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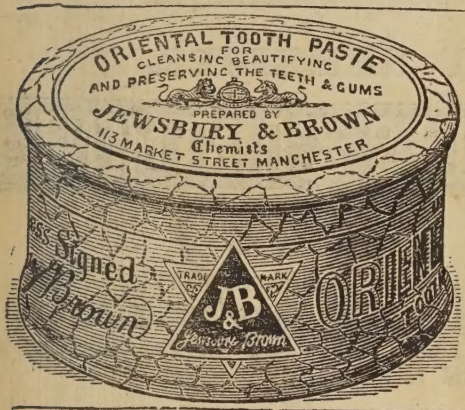

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A SECRET OF THE SEA

&c.

BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1886

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A collection of short stories by Brander Matthews, an American writer.

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
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TO

ANDREW LANG

'I have been a great Traveller in Fairy-land myself'

STEELE'S Tender Husband, Act i. Scene i.

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A SECRET OF THE SEA

A SECRET OF THE SEA

I.

PIRACY ON THE HIGH SEAS.

TIME was when the R.M.S. 'Patagonia' was the greyhound of the Atlantic; but that time was long past. Newer and larger boats, burning less coal and making more knots, had been built nearly every year since the 'Patagonia' had beaten the record by crossing the ocean in less than eight days from Browhead Castle to Fire Island Light. Now not only were there other deer-hounds of the deep two days faster than the 'Patagonia' had ever been, but the 'Patagonia' herself, like the man who went around the world, had lost a day. Although the 'Patagonia' had changed owners, and was now no longer a royal mail steam-ship, it had not yet fallen to the low estate of the sea-tramp, a homeless wanderer over the face of the waters, bearing hides from Buenos Ayres on one trip, and on the next carrying coals from Newcastle. She still belonged to a line in good repute, and she still made her regular round trip every five weeks from Liverpool to New York.

Thus it was that the New York newspapers had to announce one Sunday morning, after the New England spring 'had set in with its usual severity,' that the 'Patagonia' had sailed from Liverpool the day before, having on board eighty-seven first-cabin passengers and two hundred and eleven in the steerage, and bringing also 100,000*l.* in gold. In due course the 'Patagonia' ought to have arrived at Sandy Hook about ten days after she left the Mersey. Except when detained by stress of weather, the 'Patagonia' was wont to arrive off Quarantine not later than Tuesday afternoon. But on this occasion Tuesday night came, and Wednesday night, and yet the 'Patagonia' came not. It happened that the R.M.S. 'Barataria,' which was then devoting its energies to the lowering of the record, had left Liverpool an hour later than the 'Patagonia,' had waited for the mails at Queenstown, as the 'Patagonia' had not, and yet had landed its passengers on Sunday morning. Nor did the officers of the 'Barataria' report any storms which would justify the tardiness of the 'Patagonia.' It was known, however, that the missing ship was perfectly sea-worthy, and, indeed, in excellent condition, and her captain was a thorough sailor. So many little mishaps may occur to delay an ocean steamer—the bearings may get themselves overheated, or it may be necessary to stop the engines in mid-ocean to repack the steam-chest—that no anxiety was felt by the public.

Just then, indeed, the public had no attention

to spare for so slight a matter as a day's delay of an ocean steamer, when the foundering of a Government despatch-boat nearly a fortnight before had been followed by the fraudulent failure of a speculative banking house, bringing down in its wake a score of smaller concerns, including an insurance company and a savings bank. Day after day Wall Street trembled with the recurring shocks of failure. The market, which before the fall of the speculative banking-house had been firm and active, became feverish and weak; stocks began to fall off three and four points at a drop; the boom of Saturday gave place to a blizzard by Thursday. While the Street was excited over the sudden collapse of the great corner in Transcontinental Telegraph, the city had no time or emotion to spare on the overdue 'Patagonia.'

When at last the 'Patagonia' did arrive, she brought news of a sensation more startling than the foundering of a United States despatch-boat or the fraudulent failure of a firm of speculative bankers. It was noon when the 'Patagonia' was sighted off Fire Island Light, and it was late in the afternoon before she reached her dock. Yet news flies fast, and the latest editions of the evening papers appeared with flaming head-lines over a few brief but double-leaded paragraphs, declaring that the most extraordinary rumours were in circulation throughout the lower part of the city to the effect that the 'Patagonia,' which had just arrived in dock, had been stopped off the Banks of Newfoundland by a

pirate. The officers of the 'Patagonia' were reticent. At the office of the owners of the line the clerks did not deny the report, but refused to give any information. All efforts to discover the whereabouts of the captain of the 'Patagonia' had been unsuccessful hitherto, and the reporters had been obliged to forego the pleasure of conducting that illegal mingling of the cross-examination and of the examination-in-chief known as an interview.

A little before eight that evening the streets were sprinkled with vociferant boys who rushed about violently proclaiming an 'extra' with shrill but not altogether articulate annunciation of its contents. Those who were beguiled into the purchasing of this catchpenny read a circumstantial account of the attack on the 'Patagonia' by a Chinese dhow. The ingenious writer gave a thrilling account of the sea-fight—an account which seemed somehow familiar to those who had once read 'Hard Cash.' He gave precise details as to the crew and armament of the pirate. He set forth succinctly the piteous appeals of the purser as the heathen Chinee removed the 100,000*l.* specie from the strong-room of the 'Patagonia' to their own light little skiffs. He was very dramatic in his description of the death of the captain of the 'Patagonia,' who, so he declared, had been forced to walk the plank—a deadly form of pedestrian exercise much in favour among pirates, as everybody knew. This imaginative effort appeared in the 'Comet,' a new evening journal, conducted by

Mr. Martin Terwilliger, who was formerly the editor of the New Centreville (California) 'Gazette-Standard,' and who was now trying to introduce into Eastern journalism the push and the go he had found successful in the West.

The account of the strange adventure which had befallen the 'Patagonia' printed in the New York papers of Friday morning was more sober than the highly spiced story in Mr. Terwilliger's extra, and the details given were ampler and more exact. It seems that the 'Patagonia' had had an uneventful trip, and on Saturday afternoon the passengers were looking forward to their arrival early in the week. Among the passengers were many notabilities—Judge Gillespie, Mr. Cable J. Dexter, the great Chicago grain operator, Mr. and Mrs. Eliphalet Duncan, Miss Daisy Fostelle, and her enterprising manager, Mr. Z. Kilburn. On Saturday afternoon, when the 'Patagonia' was in latitude 45° 32′ and longitude 50° 28′ a steamer hove in sight off the port bow. It was a long, low, rakish craft, all black. It had evidently been waiting for the 'Patagonia,' for as soon as it had had time to make sure of the 'Patagonia's' identity, it ran across her course, fired a shot across her bows, and ran up the signal Q. H., which means 'Stop; I have something to communicate.' The firing of this shot by the strange ship caused the most intense excitement and alarm on board of the 'Patagonia,' which was not allayed when the meaning of the signal was made known. While the officers of the 'Pata-

gonia' were in consultation, the stranger fired a second shot across her bows, and ran up a second signal, P. F.—'I want a boat immediately.' The firing of this second shot increased the anxiety and doubt on board the 'Patagonia.' The excited passengers besought the officers to explain what this meant. Experienced passengers, accustomed to cross the ocean twice a year, declared that the firing of a shot was a thing absolutely unheard of except in time of war. There was an immediate discussion as to whether war could have broken out since the 'Patagonia' left Liverpool. An Irish gentleman on board declared that these were the first shots fired by the new dynamite cruiser of the new navy of the new Irish Republic. While the passengers were thus seeking the truth, the captain of the 'Patagonia' had ordered her engines slowed down. By this time the strange ship was barely a mile from them, and it was then easy to see many suspicious circumstances. For one thing, not a single member of the crew was visible. To those with any knowledge it was plain at once that the stranger was heavily armed, and that the single huge gun it carried amidships, easily to be seen from the deck of the 'Patagonia,' had range and weight enough to sink the 'Patagonia' by a single shot. The extreme speed of the stranger was also apparent, as it had turned, and without difficulty it was keeping ahead of the 'Patagonia,' and at the same distance from her. A deputation of the passengers immediately waited on the captain to beg

him to send a boat at once, before the stranger fired a third time. The captain had already given orders to stop the engines and to lower a boat. The third officer took his seat in this boat, and the men pulled out straight for the stranger. A movement was at once visible on board the armed steamer ; the signal flags were taken in, and a boat was launched on the port side, out of sight from the 'Patagonia.' This boat proved to be a gig, for it shot around the bow of the stranger, and met the cutter from the 'Patagonia' about a quarter of a mile away. A communication was passed from one boat to the other, and each pulled for its own ship. On reaching the 'Patagonia,' the third officer went at once to the captain's room. He bore a sealed envelope addressed to the captain. This address, like the letter within, was written, or rather printed, on a type-writer. The letter was as follows :

S. S. 'Dare-Devil,'
Off the Banks,
April 1st, 1882.

Captain Riding,
S. S. 'Patagonia,'
Sir:

You have on board in specie 100,000*l.* I will accept this as the ransom of your ship. Send it to me, 20,000*l.* at a time, on five trips of your cutter. If I do not receive the first instalment within fifteen minutes

after you read this, I shall sink you with a shot from my long gun.

Your obedient servant,

Lafitte,

Commanding Free Cruiser

'Dare-Devil.'

As the captain finished reading this peremptory letter there was a sudden commotion on deck, and one of the junior officers rushed in to report that the stranger had raised the Black Flag. The captain stepped on deck, and with his glass easily made out the white skull and cross-bones which adorned the black flag flying from the peak of the 'Dare-Devil.' A thrill of horror ran through the excited passengers. Mr. Kilburn headed a deputation which begged the captain to surrender anything and everything for the sake of saving the lives and liberties of the passengers. Mr. Cable J. Dexter, who had previously taken the affair as a huge joke, read the letter from the 'Dare-Devil,' and asked the captain if a single shot would really sink the 'Patagonia.' The captain answered that a single shot in the compartment amidships might sink the ship, and that two or three shots would do it unfailingly. 'Then,' said Mr. Dexter, 'you had better hand over the gold. I have an engagement in Chicago on Saturday morning, and I shall be late for it if I have to swim ashore from here.' Although Mr. Dexter seemed cool enough to jest, most of the passengers were in a state of intense

excitement, and this was much increased by the announcement that the long gun on the upper deck of the 'Dare-Devil' had just been loaded, and was now trained on the 'Patagonia.'

By this time ten minutes had elapsed since the boat had returned, and suddenly a third shot from the 'Dare-Devil' ploughed the water just ahead of the 'Patagonia', and a third signal was run up, J. D. —'You are standing into danger.' Then the captain yielded. The purser had already opened the strong room, and the tightly sealed, iron-strapped, hard-wood boxes of specie were at once carried on deck. Each box held 5,000*l.*, and weighed about a hundred pounds. Four of them were carefully placed in the bottom of the cutter. Fortunately there was only a light breeze, and there was no sea on at all, only the long swell always to be expected off the Banks. The boat pulled for the 'Dare-Devil,' and, as before, the gig came around the bow. The transfer of the precious boxes was made as quickly and as carefully as possible. When the cutter returned for its second load, the officer reported that the three men in the gig were all masked, but that he took them for Orientals of some sort, as their hands and wrists were dark. Five times the cutter carried away four boxes, containing each 5,000*l.*, and five times the gig came out to receive the ransom. Before the fifth trip was completed night was falling. When the third officer reached the deck after the delivery of the final instalment of the 100,000*l.*, he took two

sealed communications to the captain. Both were printed on a type-writer. One was a receipt for the gold, signed 'Lafitte.' The other was an order to the captain of the 'Patagonia' to turn on her course and to sail back toward Ireland until midnight, when she might turn and proceed again to New York. Until night made it impossible to see clearly, the passengers of the 'Patagonia' watched the 'Dare-Devil' steaming in their wake. At midnight precisely, Captain Riding changed his course and headed for New York, arriving without further adventure.

This was, in substance, the story which held the place of honour in every New York newspaper the morning after the arrival of the 'Patagonia.' And this direct statement was supplemented by numberless interviews. In the hands of men entirely great, the interview is mightier than the sword, and no more to be avoided than the pestilence which walketh in darkness. No paper succeeded in getting anything out of any of the officers, although one enterprising journal laid before its readers the *obiter dicta* of the chief steward. Several reporters succeeded in capturing Mr. Cable J. Dexter just as that great operator was checking his trunks for Chicago. At one period in his eventful career Mr. Dexter had himself been a reporter, and he surrendered himself to the inquisitors without false shame.

'I'm in a hurry, boys,' he said, 'and I really haven't any pointers to give you. Of course we

couldn't expect good luck this trip; we had four clergymen aboard—Holy Joes, the sailors call 'em. That's enough to make a boat snap her shaft off short. At first I thought maybe the actors and actresses on board would be a set-off, but it didn't work. The pirate just broke me. Oh no: he didn't go through me like a road-agent, but it was just as bad. I'd been sitting with mean cards all the afternoon, and just as the pirate fired at us I filled a full hand--and it was a jackpot too—but when the pirate opened, the game closed. What's worse, I had big money up on the run, and that damned pirate spoiled that too. I wish he'd quit the sea and buck against the market in breadstuffs —I'd make it hot for him!'

While certain of the passengers were wary and fought shy of the reporters, none of the gentlemen of the press found any difficulty in gaining admission to the presence of Miss Daisy Fostelle, who had taken her usual spacious apartments at the Apollo Hotel. When they sent up their cards with a request for an interview, Mr. Kilburn, Miss Fostelle's enterprising manager, descended to the office to meet them, greeted them most affectionately, and introduced them at once with effusive cordiality.

'I'm so very glad to be back again in America,' said Miss Daisy Fostelle, 'though perhaps I ought not to say that, for I had such a success in England. I played nearly six weeks at the Royal Frivolity theatre. Of course at first they did not quite

understand me—my style was so original, they said—so American, you know—and they did not quite know what to make of it. But I soon became a great favourite. They liked my play too; it's the one I am to appear in here next Monday. It's called "A Pretty Girl." Oh, thank you! It's so nice of you to say so. I had an offer to play in Paris at the Folies Fantastiques theatre—that's the best comedy theatre in Paris, you know—and they would have translated my play into French, but I was in a hurry to get back to dear old New York. Yes, the Prince of Wales was very kind indeed. He came three times to see me. Oh dear, no. I'm not going to be married—why, I'm not even engaged! I don't see who could start such absurd rumours. You know I am wedded to my art. No, I didn't see the pirate at all, and I assure you I should not care to play the leading part in the "The Pirate's Bride." I should have hated to have been robbed of my trunks, for I have brought such lovely clothes. There is one dress made for the Empress of Austria; oh, it's beautiful! I shall wear it on Monday night.'

Two or three of the chiefs of the dynamite faction of the Social Anarchists threw themselves in the way of the inquiring reporters, but no definite information could be extracted from them, although they were full of vague hints and mysterious innuendoes, and let fall dark intimations that they knew all about the matter. None of the New York papers made any comment on their

doubtful sayings, but the interviews with them were telegraphed to England, and called forth indignant leaders from the London journals.

The editorials of the morning papers in New York were devoted chiefly to a statement of the strangeness of the robbery. Piracy on the high seas in the nineteenth century, and within a few hours' sail of the United States, seemed like an anachronism. One paper, referring to the sinking of the Government despatch-boat, and the fraudulent bankruptcy, 'preceding a piracy as bold as any in the records of the Spanish Main,' called its able editorial 'A Carnival of Carelessness and Crime.' It suggested the immediate formation of an International League for the Patrol of the Ocean. This suggestion was accompanied by a map, and by a statistical table of the water traffic between Great Britain and the United States. Another paper had a special despatch from Washington declaring that the Secretary of the Navy would wait for further details before sending out the available vessel of the North Atlantic Squadron. A third paper came out with a quadruple sheet devoted to corporation advertising, and a series of brief biographies of the eminent pirates of the past, with outline portraits of Captain Kidd, as he sailed, and of Lafitte, the pirate of the Gulf. A stalwart organ remarked that while pirates were at large, ocean travelling could no longer be considered safe, and added that no pirate would have dared to

show his face if the spirited foreign policy of Senator Doolittle had been followed up. This allowed an Independent afternoon paper to retort that as Senator Doolittle had sent a substitute to the war, it might be doubted whether even a one-armed pirate with the gout would be afraid to meet him in single combat.

But the afternoon papers contained news of more importance than this humorous expression of Independent opinion. They contained the astounding declaration that the 100,000*l* in specie which the pirate had taken from the 'Patagonia' had been returned, and was now in the possession of the agents of the line.

In company with the captain, the chief officer, and the third officer, the purser of the 'Patagonia' had gone early in the morning to the office of the agents of the line in Bowling Green. Here each of the officers told his story, which was taken down by a stenographer. As the purser was about to return to the dock, one of the clerks said, 'We have received those cases for you.'

'What cases?' asked the purser.

'The cases from Halifax,' answered the clerk.

'But I am not expecting any cases from Halifax,' was the purser's hasty reply.

'There are two cases here for you, anyhow,' said the clerk. 'They are addressed to you, they arrived this morning, and they are very heavy—as though they had machinery in them.'

The thought flashed into several minds at once

that these cases might contain infernal machines intended to destroy the office of the line, the records of the company, and the chief witnesses against the pirate. The police were notified, and in their presence the cases were opened with the greatest circumspection. The cases were found to be almost empty, except in one corner of each case, where there was a strong compartment. With redoubled care these compartments were forced open. They contained the 100,000*l* in specie, in the original tightly sealed, iron-strapped, hard-wood boxes, as addressed in England to the American consignees, whose initials and numbers they bore.

The police of Halifax were at once telegraphed to ; but the only information they could give was that the express charges had been paid by an unknown woman, who had requested that the cases be sent for. The police of New York now became as mysterious as the delegates of the Dynamite faction had been the day before. They consulted together, and allowed it to be believed that they had a clue. And there the matter rested.

The arrival of the next steamer was now awaited anxiously, to see whether it had been stopped also, or if it had at least seen any sign of the pirate. Within forty-eight hours after the unexpected and inexplicable recovery of the gold, five ocean steamers came into port. They were boarded in the lower bay by authorised reporters, but neither officers nor passengers had any information to give. They had not seen the pirate, nor

heard of him. Nor has the 'Dare-Devil' ever been seen again as she appeared to the anxious eyes of the passengers on the 'Patagonia.' Nor have any more orders, written on a type-writer and signed by Lafitte, been served on any steamer laden with specie.

The sudden restoration of the gold taken from the 'Patagonia,' while it increased the peculiar mystery of the affair, materially lessened the interest of those whose duty it was to hunt down the pirate. A search for the specie would have been practical, but the discovery of a pirate magnanimous enough to give up 100,000*l.* had only a speculative interest. At best it was little more than the solving of a riddle—Who was the pirate? It was but the answering of a conundrum—Why had he taken the money if he meant to return it? Men in the thick of business have no time to waste in guessing enigmas. Viewed as a whole, the robbery of the 'Patagonia,' only to return the gold, appeared purposeless. It assumed almost the form of a practical joke. To some it seemed even like a freak of insanity. Many vain efforts were made to penetrate the mystery, to guess at the pirate, and to impute a motive for his rash and reckless act; but in a few days the interest of the public began to wane, and just then it was suddenly diverted to another sensation, of more direct and personal importance to every inhabitant of the Eastern coast. A series of sharp shocks was felt by everybody on three distinct occasions. An

earthquake was a novel experience to most New-Yorkers, and the reporters turned their attention at once to picturesque descriptions of effects of the visitation, and to interviews with those who had dwelt long in volcanic lands. So it came to pass that people soon ceased to puzzle themselves further about the secret of the sea.

II.

A STERN CHASE.

THERE was one person, however, who did not allow his attention to be diverted from the strange adventure of the 'Patagonia' by any gossip about an earthquake. This person was Mr. Robert White. He was a good-looking and keen-witted young American of thirty, with straight features and curly hair. The son of a clergyman established over an Episcopalian church in an inland city, he had been graduated at a fresh-water college; but he had always had a thirst for salt-water, and when he came to New York to the Law School of Columbia College, he took to the water with joy. He rowed in the Law School boat at the college regatta on the Harlem in the spring. He did his duty all summer on the yacht of a friend who was fond of sailing Corinthian races. He learned navigation, and at the school he even gave special study to maritime law. Just as he was admitted to the bar, his father died, leaving his little property unfortunately involved. Robert White saw at once not only that he could no longer hope for the assistance he would need while he was working

and waiting at the bar, but also that he must bear part, at least, of the burden of supporting his mother and his sister. He did not hesitate. He had edited one of the two warring college papers ; and after he came to New York he had written a few letters for the chief daily of his native town. His pen was broken to service, and he went at once to the editor of the 'Gotham Gazette,' whom he had met on Joshua Hoffman's yacht, and asked for work. The editor told the city editor to do what he could for him. The city editor sent him to interview one of the most distinguished men of New England—a prize-fighter, then on his first visit to New York. The next day his assignment sent him down to Castle Garden to sift the sensational stories of a lot of Russian emigrants. This was not congenial work ; but within a few weeks there was a regatta, and it fell to him to write it up. Here was his chance. The next morning the 'Gotham Gazette' contained the best account of a yacht race, the most precise and the most picturesque, which had been printed for many a month. It made a hit, as even the work of the anonymous reporter may do if it is done with heart and head. It assured his position on the 'Gotham Gazette,' which sent him to cruise with the yacht squadron, to report the naval review at Newport before the President of the United States, and to give a description of the movements of the United States Fish Commission. To these letters his initials were attached. One of them, a vigorous account of the showy experiments

of a torpedo-boat, attracted the notice of a sharp-eyed editor of one of the great magazines, and he wrote, asking if Mr. Robert White would care to contribute three or four articles on the New England coast, to be called, 'All Along Shore,' and to be illustrated in the highest style of American wood-engraving. To this pleasant task Mr. Robert White devoted the end of summer. When he returned to town the editor of the 'Gotham Gazette' asked him if he would like 'to write brevier, or, in other words, to join the editorial staff. At the time when the 'Patagonia' met the pirate Mr. Robert White had been writing naval, legal, and social editorials for several years; his magazine articles had appeared at last, they had been followed by others, and they had been gathered into a handsome book, which had been well reviewed in the leading English weeklies. A series of sketches of American out-door sports, signed 'Poor Bob White,' had been very successful. His income was not large, but it was ample for his needs, since his mother had died and his sister had married. His position was assured as one of the cleverest and most competent of the young men who drive the double team, journalism and literature. He had begun both to lay money by and to collect notes for a real book, not a mere collection of magazine papers: this was the 'Story of a Ship,' a history of boats from the dug-out of the lake-dweller to the latest device in submerged torpedo launches. And he had done one thing more of greater im-

portance to himself than any of these—he had fallen in love.

When the meeting took place between the 'Patagonia' and the 'Dare-Devil,' Mr. Robert White was at his native town settling his father's estate, and he did not return to New York until after the 'Patagonia' had sailed again. He had read all the newspaper accounts and interviews with great interest. The first day after his return he went to see Mr. Eliphalet Duncan, who had been his classmate at the law school. The offices of Duncan and Sutton, attorneys and counsellors at law, were in the Bowdoin Building, No. 76 Broadway, next to those of Hitchcock and Van Rensselaer. As White went upstairs he passed a small door on which was painted 'Sargent and Co., Stock Deliveries,' and his heart gave a sudden throb, for it was Miss Dorothy Sargent, the daughter of the great speculator, that he was in love with.

'Why, Bob, how are you?' said Mr. Eliphalet Duncan, as his friend took a seat beside him. 'I haven't seen you since the last Judge-and-Jury dinner.'

The Judge-and-Jury was a little club to which both had belonged at the law school, and which now survived only in an annual dinner.

'I'm all right, 'Liph; and you are too, judging by your looks. A hasty run over to Scotland and back seems to suit you. I saw you came back by the "Patagonia," and that's why I've come in today.'

'Your intention seems to be complimentary, but your logic is incoherent,' remarked the lawyer.

White laughed, and answered: 'I will make myself clear to the dullest comprehension.'

'Of course,' interrupted his friend.

'You know my fondness for solving problems. I always delighted in algebra at school, and I worked out the *pons* for myself. Now this unnecessary taking and giving back of the gold on the "Patagonia" strikes me as a puzzle as interesting as a man can find in a week of Sundays.'

'I doubt if you would have found it quite as interesting if you had lost a day by it,' said Duncan, dryly.

'I expect to give more than one day to it,' answered White. 'In fact, I want to stick to the case until I puzzle out the secret.'

'The detectives say they have a clue.'

'The reporter is the real detective nowadays, and as he is wont to tell all he knows, and as he has said nothing, there is, I take it, nothing known, and that leaves everything to be found out.'

'And you are going to try and to out everything?'

'And I am going to try to find out everything —with your help.'

'For publication in the "Gotham Gazette"?' asked the lawyer.

'For my own satisfaction first,' answered the journalist—'for the sheer enjoyment of getting at a mystery; but, of course, in the end, if I find I

have a story to tell, I shall tell it. And it seems to me that it ought not to be very hard to track the pirate to his lair.'

'I doubt if I can give you much help, but of course you are welcome to all I know.'

'The court is with you,' said White.

'I was in the main saloon, playing chess with Judge Gillespie as well as I could, while a young lady was at the piano singing "When the Sea gives up its Dead." Just as the judge mated me, we heard a shot. Going on deck, we saw the pirate, barely a mile away. I wondered why the shot had been fired, and it was not until I saw the black flag that I was willing to believe that the strange ship was a corsair. Why, I'd just as soon expected to cruise in the "Flying Dutchman" as to see a pirate—except, of course, in Penzance.'

'What was the pirate like?'

'She was a schooner-rigged steamer of perhaps three hundred tons burden, and she was a little more than a hundred feet long. She had two smoke-stacks, painted black with a red band She rode very high out of the water, as though her bulwarks had been added to.'

'From the newspaper reports I infer that she was neither American nor English in build,' said White.

'There you are wrong, I think,' Duncan declared. 'In spite of a lateen-sail and other details, I am sure that the pirate was launched in American waters.'

'But what motive could induce an American yachtsman to turn pirate, and then to give up the proceeds of his crime?' asked White. 'Piracy on the high seas is rather a violent practical joke.'

'As to motives I can say nothing; I give you my opinion as to the facts only. In my belief the pirate was built in America. What is more, I doubt if she was as fast as the "Patagonia," and I think that we could have run away with little risk.'

'Why?'

'Because we kept gaining on her as soon as we took to our heels.'

'But a single shot from the long gun amidships would have sunk you.'

'Of course,' said Eliphalet Duncan, offering a cigar to his friend. 'I never heard of a Quaker turning pirate, but I think that was a Quaker gun!'

'What!' shouted White, in intense surprise.

'The gun fired across our bows was aimed through a port on the main-deck forward. The long gun was never fired at all, and I don't believe it could be fired. I believe it was a dummy. And that's what Judge Gillespie thinks too, and you know he is a West-Pointer.'

'A Quaker gun on a pirate!' said White, thoughtfully. 'Who ever heard of such a thing?'

'Who ever heard of a pirate's writing his messages on a type-writer?' asked Duncan.

'The presence of a type-writer on board is evidence is favour of your view that the piratical craft belongs in our own waters. The pirate of the

old school might sign his own name with his own blood, but he had no use for a type-writer.'

'The making of a Quaker gun,' said Duncan, 'and the use of a type-writer, both suggest Yankee gumption. If you want to find the pirate, you need not cross the ocean. I do not know where the "Dare-Devil" went after leaving Halifax, but I feel sure that the "Dare-Devil" hailed from an American port.'

'But I see one of the accounts mentions that the crew of the gig which came out to receive the gold were Orientals,' objected White.

'That's true,' answered Duncan; 'the third officer told me that they were Lascars, all but the man who sat in the stern-sheets.'

'And what was he?'

'As well as the third officer could judge, he was a white man, rather portly, with bright eyes, a large nose, and a long black moustache. Apparently this man's skin was stained, for he was as dark as the Lascars, and he wore a false beard. In spite of this disguise, he impressed the third officer as a man of strong will and quick determination.'

'Proper piratical qualities.'

'Of course,' assented Duncan.

'Do you think this man with the stained face, the long moustache, and the false beard was the pirate chief, the new Lafitte?' asked White.

'That was my impression,' answered Duncan. 'It seems to me very probable that the head which

had planned the robbery should personally see to the delivery of the treasure.'

'That brings up again the chief puzzle—why did he take the gold if he meant to give it up, and why did he give it up after running the risk of disgrace and death to get it? This is the main question. It is more important to get an answer to that than to identify the man or the ship, or rather to find a motive of this apparently motiveless act will be to have gone far toward the discovery of the man himself.'

'As for motives,' said Duncan, 'there are a plenty.'

'Such as——?'

'I mean that there are possible explanations in plenty of these proceedings. Perhaps the man was mad: there is a simple explanation.'

'A little too simple, I fear: marine kleptomania is not an accepted plea as yet,' said White.

'A madman may have great cunning and persistence,' urged Duncan. 'Or the man may have been sane but fickle, and after the robbery he quietly changed his mind.'

'That is rather a strain on our credulity, isn't it?' queried White.

'It is improbable, but it may be the fact, for all that. Then, again, perhaps the mate of the "Dare-Devil" experienced a change of heart, and repented of his piracies, and converted the rest of the crew, and got them to mutiny, whereupon they made Mr.

Lafitte walk the plank, after which they returned the gold, and then they scuttled the ship.'

White smiled, and said, 'I see Lascars giving up gold and scuttling a ship.'

'It would be a pity to think that so pretty a yacht had been sent to the bottom.'

'So you think the pirate was a yacht?'

Duncan hesitated a moment, and then answered: 'What else could she be? Plainly enough she was not a Government gun-boat, and as plainly she was not a boat built for freight or passengers; she had no hold for the one, and no accommodation for the others. What could she be but a pleasure-boat?'

'But a yacht has not high bulwarks or two smoke-stacks,' objected White.

'Of course there had been an attempt to disguise her. I think the bulwarks were part of the disguise; and perhaps the second smoke-stack was too, although that had not struck me before.'

'Then,' said White, 'in your opinion, the "Dare-Devil" is an American steam-yacht of perhaps three hundred tons, and about a hundred feet long?'

'It is unprofessional to give an opinion without a retainer,' answered the lawyer, smiling, 'but you have expressed my private views with precision and point.'

'The witness may stand down,' said the journalist, rising. 'Having inserted the corkscrew of interrogation, and extracted the pure wine of truth,

I have no further use for you. Now I must tear myself away.'

'Come in and dine with us quietly one night next week. Mrs. Duncan will be glad to see you.'

'I'd like to do it, but I have no time. You see, I have been away for a fortnight, and I'm in arrears with my work.'

'Make it Tuesday, and you will meet Miss Sargent,' urged Duncan.

'Tuesday?' said White, as his pulse quickened. 'I think, perhaps, I could manage it on Tuesday.'

'Then we shall expect you at half-past six. There'll only be four of us. You know Miss Sargent, I think.'

'Oh yes, I know her,' answered White, as lightly as he could.

'A charming girl—isn't she?' asked Duncan.

'She is, indeed,' said White, with perhaps more warmth than was absolutely necessary.

'She is a great friend of my wife's,' said Duncan —and White envied Mrs. Duncan—'and she's always at our house'—and then White envied Duncan. To hear her name was a delight, and to talk about her was a delicious torture. After a moment's silence he said,

'I see her father's office is just under you.'

'Oh yes, Sam Sargent has his head-quarters here. I don't know whether you like that man, Bob, or not?'

'I do not know him,' answered White, uneasily.

'Well, I know him, and I detest him. When-

ever I see him and think of his daughter, then I know his wife must have been an angel from heaven.'

'You are a little rough on him, 'Liph,' said White, deprecatingly.

'No, I am not. She has an air of breeding, and she carries herself like a lady, but her father is not a gentleman—at least—you know what I mean. The man is coarse-grained, in spite of all his smartness and brilliancy. You have only to look in his face to see that. He took up the right trade when he turned gambler.'

'Gambler?'

'Of course. Stock speculator, if you like that term better. Speculating in stocks is not business; it is gambling. The money made in speculating is not business earnings, whatever it may pretend to be; it is winnings, no more and no less. I don't object to a game of poker now and then myself, but when I win thirty or forty dollars I don't put the sum down in my books as earnings. Now it is men like Sam Sargent who have confused and corrupted the public mind in regard to this thing. They are gamblers, but they masquerade in the honourable garb of business men. And he has the impudence to want to go into politics.'

'He is no worse than the rest,' ventured White apologetically.

'Of course,' retorted Duncan, promptly; 'and he's no better. And he'll come to grief, like the rest of them. Only a few days ago he had a very tight squeeze, so Mat Hitchcock tells me.'

'How so?'

'He was caught in the Transcontinental Telegraph corner, and he would have lost all he had left, and more too, if this brief panic had not come to his rescue, and knocked the bottom out of the market. It was this fraudulent bankruptcy and the failures it caused which saved Sam Sargent.'

'You do not like him?' said White, smiling.

'But I like his daughter,' answered Duncan.

'So do I,' replied White as cheerfully as he could.

'Of course,' said Duncan; 'and we shall expect you on Tuesday.'

'You may rely on me;' and White shook hands with Eliphalet Duncan and withdrew. As he reached the foot of the stairs, opposite to the office of Sargent and Co., the door opened, and a customer came out, pausing on the threshold to ask, 'When do you expect Mr. Sargent back?' White could not help hearing the answer: 'He'll be here in a week or two. You know he is at Bermuda, on the "Rhadamanthus," with old Joshua Hoffman.' White knew that Joshua Hoffman was one of the most distinguished citizens of New York—a man who had made a fortune, which he administered for the public good as though he was not the owner, but only a trustee for the poor and the struggling.

'If Sam Sargent is off on a cruise with Joshua Hoffman,' thought the young man who was in love with Sam Sargent's daughter, 'why, he can't be quite as black as 'Liph paints him.'

It was on Friday that Robert White had called on Eliphalet Duncan, and he gave most of Saturday also to the pursuit of the pirate. He had a long talk with Judge Gillespie, who confirmed all that Duncan had said. The so-called 'Dare-Devil' was probably an American steam-yacht of three hundred tons or thereabouts. Now there were five or six yachts on the American register which answered fairly enough to the description of the 'Dare-Devil,' after making due allowances for the efforts to disguise her. But all of these—except two—were easily accounted for, and must be unhesitatingly ruled out, as they were not in commission. Of the two American steam-yachts approximately like the 'Dare-Devil,' one, the 'Pretty Polly,' belonged to a wealthy clergyman, and was then in the Mediterranean, cruising along the Holy Land with a full ship's company of missionaries; the other was at Bermuda—it was the 'Rhadamanthus,' and it belonged to the good Joshua Hoffman.

When, by a process of exhaustion, as the logicians call it, Mr. Robert White had arrived at this useless result, it was late on Saturday afternoon, and he looked back along the week, and he felt that it had been well-nigh wasted. He had not made any progress toward the solution of the problem of the piracy against the 'Patagonia,' and he had not seen Miss Dorothy Sargent.

III.

TAKING SOUNDINGS.

ROBERT WHITE had met Miss Dorothy Sargent for the first time late in the preceding fall. Mrs. Eliphalet Duncan, who was always getting up something new, got up a riding party to go together to Yonkers for a light dinner, and to ride back to the city by the light of the autumn moon. As the merry cavalcade set forth Mrs. Duncan introduced Mr. White to Miss Sargent, by whose air of distinction, as she sat firmly on a high-spirited bay mare, he had been attracted already. Her manner, like her simple habit, which fitted her slight figure to perfection, was quiet and unobtrusive; and she had in abundance that indefinable but unmistakable quality called style. Her light golden hair was tied in a neat knot under her tall hat, and a semicircle of veil half hid her face, although a bright glance from her frank blue eyes passed without difficulty through the filmy barrier as Mrs. Duncan presented White to her. This glance, the merry smile which occasioned it, the ray of the afternoon sun as it made molten the twisted gold of her hair, the gentle dignity of her

attitude—these united in a picture which printed itself indelibly in White's memory.

Before they had passed the reservoir in Central Park White had discovered that Miss Sargent rode well, like one with a strong natural gift of horsemanship, well developed by an intelligent master. As they cantered side by side through the russet bowers and leaf-strewn lanes of the park, he could not but notice how perfectly her exquisite American grace seemed to harmonise with the soft and delicate hues of the fading landscape, as the glory of the American autumn was fast departing. He marked how her colour rose with the Amazonian enjoyment, with the honest delight of the genuine horsewoman, and he wondered how she came by her beauty. He was vaguely familiar with the features of her father, one of the best-known men about town, and he knew that Sam Sargent was an operator in stocks and a fellow of bluff joviality, hail-fellow-well-met with most men, getting the utmost possible sensual enjoyment out of life, and having no sympathy at all with plain living and high thinking.

There was no lack of candidates for the place by Miss Sargent's side as the little party rode forth, or as it rode back again by the full light of a glorious moon; but White set his wits to work, and managed to monopolise her company the whole of the long blissful afternoon and the happy evening—all too short. Before they reached the park on their return he was on the verge of

wishing that her lively mare would try to run away or to throw her, or to do anything that would give him a chance to show his devotion. When at last he had helped her to dismount and had said good night, he felt lifted out of himself, and as though intoxicated by some mysterious but delicious elixir. He was in love ; and the thought of his own unworthiness brought him back to earth, and kept him awake a good part of the night.

As it began, so it went on all winter. White discovered where she went to church, and he walked home with her on Thanksgiving morning, learning that her father rarely ventured within the sacred edifice except when some famous pulpit orator came to preach a charity sermon. On Christmas Day he sat in a pew where he might gaze his fill upon her, and his heart overflowed with peace and good-will. Mrs. Duncan—just before she made her hurried trip to Europe—asked a little party to see the old year out and the new year in, and as White kept as close as he could to Dorothy the new year began for him with joy and gladness. Mrs. Duncan's sister-in-law, Mrs. Sutton, kept Twelfth Night with due celebration of the ancient rites of that honourable feast. Chance crowned White king, and of course he chose Dorothy for his queen. He noticed that her face flushed with pleasure as he took her by the hand. But before the evening was over he began to wonder how he had displeased her, for of course he could not think her capricious. When next

they met she was cold toward him, and he suspected she had avoided him. On St. Valentine's Day he mustered up courage and sent her a tall screen of growing ivy, in the centre of which clustered a bunch of uncut Jacqueminot roses in the shape of a heart. For this she thanked him in a clever little note, as distant as it was kindly. He wondered whether she guessed that he loved her, and sought to discourage him.

This was the state of affairs between them when they sat opposite to each other at one of those exquisite little dinners for four which Mrs. Duncan was famous for. There was a dim, religious light in the Duncans' dining-room befitting the mystic rites of gastronomy. As White looked up and caught Dorothy's eye he wondered whether the faint flush which spread over cheek and throat in such becoming fashion was really a blush, or whether it was due only to the red silk shades on the tall candles at the corners of the table.

'I see the eye of the law upon me, Mr. White,' she said, gaily. 'What will the verdict be?'

'You deserve to be drawn and quartered, Dora,' interjected Mrs. Duncan, 'for keeping us waiting seven minutes. Fortunately I knew your ways, and allowed ten.'

'Why is it you are always seven minutes late?' asked Duncan. 'You have nothing to do.'

'Nothing to do? Well, I like that!' began Dorothy.

'Of course,' said Duncan, maliciously. 'I

think I should like having nothing to do myself —for a little while.'

'That's just like a man!' retorted the young lady. 'I'm sure I've done more than you have. I've been to cooking school, and I have had an Italian lesson, and I've practised two hours, and I've been shopping, and I've paid ten visits, besides keeping house, which is work enough for one able-bodied woman.'

'Indeed it is,' interrupted Mrs. Duncan, whose household was organised to run like clock-work, and who never heard from it except when it struck.

'My father never scolds,' continued Miss Sargent, 'but he depends on me to make him comfortable. I don't know what he'd do without me.'

'He has to do without you when you dine out,' said Duncan slyly.

'Oh, then I send him off to the club—and he goes like a lamb! Why, in the three weeks before Lent he dined at home only once.'

'Was he invited out?' asked Duncan.

'No; but I was,' she answered frankly. 'He used to meet Mr. Thursby at the club, and they dined together.'

'Dick Thursby?' asked Mrs. Duncan.

'Yes. My father's very fond of him—he says he's a man of a thousand.'

'He's a man of a good many thousands, if report can be believed,' said White, remembering

with a sudden sinking of the heart that rumour reported this Mr. Thursby as very devoted to Miss Sargent.

'His wife left him a lot of money,' said Duncan.

'And her mother has never forgiven him for taking it,' added Mrs. Duncan. 'She abuses him dreadfully.'

'No man is a hero to his mother-in-law,' said White, lightly. He was afraid of Thursby, but he was not willing to say anything against him.

'That's not because he may not be a hero,' suggested Dorothy, 'but rather because she is a mother-in-law.'

'I hear he is beginning to take notice again,' remarked Mrs. Duncan.

'He's been flirting outrageously with that Hitchcock girl all winter,' said Dorothy.

'Dear me,' said Mrs. Duncan, slyly, 'I thought he had been very attentive to you.'

'I never noticed that,' laughed Dorothy, as White moved uneasily. 'The only things I did notice about him were that he had a large mouth, and that only very small talk fell from it.'

'Then you are not setting your cap for him?' said Duncan, inquisitively.

'Do you think I am a young lady with all the modern improvements ready to marry any goose if he has golden eggs?'

'I will not discuss the point with you,' said Duncan. 'I never care to argue at dinner; the

one who is not hungry always gets the best of it.'

White breathed more freely when he heard her treat his rival thus scornfully.

'I did not think Mr. Thursby was an unintelligent man,' said Mrs. Duncan; 'he was in Congress for a year or two.'

'Why didn't he serve his full term?' asked White, unable to resist the chance. 'Was he pardoned out?'

'Mr. White'—and Miss Dorothy's voice was very mischievous—'when you speak slightingly of Congress, perhaps you forget that my father has political aspirations.'

'I assure you I did not know it,' and poor White blushed scarlet at his blunder.

'Mr. Joshua Hoffman has been urging my father to go to Congress for a long while.'

'Joshua Hoffman's help is worth having,' remarked Duncan, as he tasted his champagne, 'no matter whether what you want is in this world or the next.'

'It is delightful to see how all classes respect and honour Hoffman's goodness,' added White. 'He's one of the few men who belong to the Church and who do not act as though the Church belonged to them.'

'He's had a great fancy for my father,' said Dorothy, 'ever since my father gave him Jeannette J.'

'He ought to be grateful for one of the finest

and fastest horses on the track,' answered White, 'although he never bets on her or lets her trot for money.'

'Isn't your father off with Joshua Hoffman now?' asked Mrs. Duncan.

'Oh yes! they are at Bermuda. They went on the "Rhadamanthus."'

White suddenly remembered that Joshua Hoffman's yacht was the only ship he had been able to find resembling the 'Dare-Devil.'

'At least my father went on her—Mr. Hoffman was delayed at the last moment, and had to wait over for the regular steamer.'

'Is he on the "Rhadamanthus" now?' queried White.

'Oh yes, he is there *now*. But my father had to go down all alone. He didn't mind that, as the sailing-master of the "Rhadamanthus" is a great friend of his. He'd do anything for my father; I heard him say so once.'

'Perhaps Mr. Sargent got him his berth?' suggested White, strangely interested in the topic, as he was in anything which might bear, however remotely, on the mysterious pirate.

'I believe he did,' replied Dorothy; 'but Captain Mills owed my father a great deal before that. At least I think so. I suppose I might as well tell the whole story. It's not much, either. But one summer, several years ago, I had been asleep in a hammock on the piazza, and I waked up just in time to hear Captain Mills say: "I owe

you more than I can ever pay, Mr. Sargent. You have done more than save my life. Talk is cheap, but I hope some day I may be able to show you that I do not forget."'

'And what did your father say to that?' asked Mrs. Duncan.

'Well, you know his jocular way. He said, "That's all right, captain; first time I want a man stabbed in the back, Italian fashion, I'll let you know." And Captain Mills took my father's hand and said, very seriously, "You may joke, Mr. Sargent, but I mean what I say, and, short of murder, I don't believe there's anything I'd stick at to do you a good turn."'

'It's lucky your father isn't a bold bad man,' said Duncan, 'or he might get Captain Mills to scuttle the ship, or to splice the main brace, or to do any of the wicked things that sailor-men delight in.'

'Don't you be too sure of my father,' Dorothy answered, gaily. 'He often says that if he wasn't on the Street he'd like to be a pirate!'

'Indeed!' ejaculated White, earnestly.

'He has a whole library of books about pirates, but he says that the best of them all is a brief biography of Blackbeard, which he found his office-boy reading.'

'Of course he took it away from the office-boy, and scolded him,' remarked Duncan, 'and then went into his private office and devoured it himself?'

'That's just what he did,' answered Dorothy, 'and he says it is the most expensive book in his library now, for while he was reading it the market went up or down, or something, and he lost a chance of making several thousand dollars.'

'Piracy is a losing business nowadays,' said White.

'Of course,' added Duncan, quickly. 'A brave man can do better now-a-days in Wall Street than on the Spanish Main.'

'I have always heard Captain Mills well spoken of,' remarked White.

'Oh, he's a fine man!' said Dorothy, enthusiastically. 'And I am so glad he is in charge of the "Rhadamanthus," now that Mr. Hoffman has a crew of Lascars.'

'Lascars?' said Duncan and White together, looking at each other.

'Yes; he shipped them a few weeks ago, when he was in the Mediterranean.'

'Joshua Hoffman does have the oddest notions,' said Mrs. Duncan.

'Of course,' remarked her husband; 'he has very queer kinks in him. But he is a good man and an honourable man, and the whole country is proud of him and of his work.'

The conversation thus directed to Joshua Hoffman's characteristically American career was enlivened by many anecdotes of his poverty in youth, of his shrewdness in business, of his simple and straightforward integrity, and of his thoughtful

and comprehensive charity. Then the talk turned to other topics as the perfectly served dinner pursued its varied courses. At last came coffee. The two ladies rose and took their tiny cups into the parlour, leaving the two men to smoke their cigars in the dining-room. But Robert White lent little attention to Duncan's shrewd and pleasant chat when Dorothy Sargent followed Mrs. Duncan across the parlour to the piano, and began to sing. She had a light, clear, soprano voice, sufficiently well trained, and she sang without effort, and as though she enjoyed it.

After she had sung two or three songs Mr. Duncan called out from the dining-room, 'Now Miss Dorothy, by request——'

'Oh, I know what you want,' she interrupted, gaily.

'Of course,' said Duncan, lighting a second cigar. His Scotch ancestors had died for the Stuarts, and he thrilled with hereditary loyalty as Miss Sargent sang 'Here's a health of King Charles,' with a dramatic intensity for which the careless observer would never have given her credit.

As Robert White rose to join the ladies, the butler told Mr. Duncan that a gentleman wanted to see him.

'Close the doors leading into the Japanese room,' said Duncan, 'and show the gentleman in here.'

The room between the parlour and the dining-

room Mrs. Duncan had decorated in the Japanese style. The walls were covered with Japanese paper and hung with plaques of *cloisonné*. The furniture was of bamboo with cushions of Japanese embroidery. Japanese lanterns, dexterously arranged for gas, shed a gentle light. Although the room was probably hopelessly incorrect in the eyes of a Japanese—had Mrs. Duncan had one on her visiting list—the effect was novel, and exotic and charming.

White passed through this room, and joined Miss Dorothy at the piano. He turned the leaves for her as she sang 'The Shepherd's Hour.' He thought she had never looked so lovely, and he knew he had never loved her as much. He felt that the time had come when he must put his fortune to the touch, when he must learn whether life was to be happiness or misery. When she finished the song she left the piano hastily, and begged Mrs. Duncan to play. White seconded her. Mrs. Duncan was an admirable pianist, but she was a match-maker even more accomplished.

'I'll play,' she said, 'on one condition only: you two must go into the Japanese room and talk.'

'Talk while you are playing?' protested Dorothy.

'Yes,' answered Mrs. Duncan firmly. 'You need not talk loudly, but you must talk: then I shall not feel as though I were giving a concert.'

'If we must, we must,' said Dorothy; and she

took a seat in the Japanese room. White sat himself down on a stool at her feet, as Mrs. Duncan began one of Mendelsshon's 'Lieder ohne Worte.'

'How lovely those songs without words are!' said Dorothy, after a silence which threatened to become embarrassing.

'How lovely it would be,' answered White, 'if we could express ourselves without words, if we could only set forth without speech the secret thoughts and feelings of our souls!'

'Do you really think so?' asked Dorothy. 'Sometimes it would be very awkward, I fear.'

'Surely you would not mind letting the whole world read your innocent heart?'

'Indeed I should,' cried Dorothy. Why, there are things I shouldn't like anybody to know.'

Robert White noticed the sudden blush which accompanied these words. In his eyes her delightful alternations of colour were perhaps her greatest beauty.

'I wish you could know without my telling what my heart is full of just now,' he said, controlling his voice as best he could.

The colour fled from her cheek, and left it as white as marble. With a little effort, she said, 'How do I know that it would interest me?'

'Don't you take any interest in me?' asked White.

'Indeed I do, Mr. White, but——'

'Then you must have seen that I love you,' he interrupted, unable to refrain any longer. 'Don't

tell me that you have not seen it. Don't tell me that my love is hopeless.'

The colour came back slowly to her face and neck, and she said, shyly, 'I do not tell you that, because it would not be true.'

'Then you do love me?'

'Just a little bit.'

He clasped her in his arms, as Mrs. Duncan turned over her music and played a nocturne of Chopin's.

They talked on in perfect bliss for a few minutes, then she said, suddenly, 'But you must speak to my father.'

'I will ask him five minutes after he sets foot on shore.'

'He will never consent,' continued Dorothy. 'He has always said he could never let me go, and I have always promised never to leave him.'

'But that was before you gave yourself to me,' said her lover.

'I suppose so, but I don't know what he will do without me.'

'Just think how I have done without you all these years. It's my turn now.'

'He has been so good to me always.'

'I will be so good to you always. How could I be anything else?'

She looked at him, and he leaned forward and kissed her softly.

'But I will never marry you without his consent,' she said.

Just then Eliphalet Duncan threw open the folding doors of the dining-room, and announced to Miss Dorothy that her maid and her coupé had come to take her home. As White rose to see her into the carriage, Duncan asked him to come back a minute after Miss Sargent was off, as he had something to tell. White waited in the hall while the maid bundled Dorothy up in her fleecy wraps. Then he helped her into her carriage. The sharp eyes of the maid were on him, and he could say nothing. He gave her hand a precious squeeze as she said 'Good-night.'

'May I see you to-morrow?' he asked.

'Yes, to-morrow,' she answered; and with this word of promise and hope they parted.

White went up to Duncan's study.

'Who do you suppose my visitor was?' asked Duncan.

'How should I know?' asked White.

'He's as anxious as you to find out who the pirate was that stopped the "Patagonia." He was one of our passengers. And he came to tell me a curious discovery of his. He is interested in a type-writer manufactory, and he noticed certain peculiarities in the notes which the pirate sent. As soon as he arrived here he set to work investigating. He has found out that the type-writer used by the pirate is one of a new style just put out by the company in which he is a shareholder. This new style was for sale only a month ago. Very few of them were sold before the First of April—the day when the pirates made fools of us.'

'Has he a list of the purchasers?' asked White, anxiously.

'His list is incomplete, but among those who bought this new style of type-writer was Joshua Hoffman.'

'The owner of the "Rhadamanthus"?' inquired the astonished White.

'Of course,' said Duncan.

IV.

IN THE PIRATE'S LAIR.

To any one not accustomed to the sharp contrasts of American life it would have seemed impossible that Miss Dorothy Sargent should be the daughter of Mr. Samuel Sargent. She was slight and graceful, delicate and ethereal, as is the wont of the American girl. He was solid and florid; he was a high liver and of a full habit. His eye was very quick and sharp, as though it was always on the main chance, but there was generally to be seen a genial smile on his sensual mouth, not altogether hidden by a heavy moustache. He was at once a very smart man and a very good fellow. His friends often referred to the magnetism of his manner. He was kindly, generous, shrewd, and unscrupulous. Moralities differ, and Sam Sargent had the morality of Wall Street, and he knew no other: he would engineer a corner without a thought of mercy; but he never 'went back' on his bank, and he never 'lay down' on his broker; and these are the cardinal virtues in the Street. According to his lights, he was an honest man, but he wore his principles easily, and he had cultivated his senses at the expense of his conscience.

His father had skimped and scraped for years that the son might go to college, and was now living in restful happiness on a big farm near his native town—a farm bought for him by his successful son. The college allowed its poorer students to pay their way by manual labour, and most of the shelving and other carpenter-work in the college library had been done by Sam Sargent, who had since endowed the library with twenty-five thousand dollars. After he left college he edited a country weekly for two or three months; then he turned auctioneer; after that he was advance agent for a small circus; then the war broke out, and he raised a company, and rose to be colonel of volunteers. Wounded and sent home on a furlough, he delayed his return from Washington to his Western home long enough to marry the most beautiful daughter of one of the proudest of the first families of Virginia. After helping to convert the steamers on the Upper Mississippi into home-made ironclads, he resigned, and became interested in various Government contracts. He did his duty by the Government, and made money for himself. He put his earnings into the little local railroad of his native place. When the war was over, and the railroads of the West began to be consolidated and to push across the plains and the mountains, the little road of which Sam Sargent was president was wanted by two rival systems. Sam Sargent sold to the highest bidder, after judiciously playing one against the other; and he brought his money and

his experience to Wall Street. A man cannot run with the hare and hold with the hounds; on the Street a new-comer is either a wolf or a lamb: Sam Sargent was not a lamb. In the uneasy and restless turmoil of the Stock Exchange he was in his element, and there he thrived. Every summer, when stocks were sluggish or stagnant, the speculator sought other forms of excitement. One year he hired a fast yacht, and the next he bought a pair of fast trotters. One summer he let his fondness for poker run away with him, and he was a player in the famous game which lasted two days and three nights: at the end of the second day he had lost $150,000, but during the last night he won it all back, and $65,000 besides. No man could deny his quickness, his coolness, or his nerve. Of late he had begun to take an interest in politics, and he was known to be seeking a nomination for Congress from one of the brown-stone districts: the machine of his party was all ready to work in his behalf. To attain to this honour was his one unsatisfied desire, and his heart was set on it.

About three weeks after the 'Patagonia' had been robbed off the Banks by the 'Dare-Devil,' Mr. Joshua Hoffman's yacht, the 'Rhadamanthus,' returned to New York from Bermuda, bringing back Mr. Sam Sargent and Mr. Joshua Hoffman himself. Among the letters which Sargent found on the table of his handsome private office in the Bowdoin Building, No. 76 Broadway, overlooking a part of Trinity Churchyard, was one from Robert

White, requesting an immediate interview on a matter of the highest importance. Sargent knew White's name as a rising young literary man, he had heard his daughter speak of meeting White, and he was aware of White's connection with the 'Gotham Gazette.' He wrote Mr. White a polite note, saying that he should be glad to see him the next day at three.

Precisely at three the next afternoon, as the bells of Trinity rang the hour over the hurrying heads of the sojourners in Wall Street, Robert White handed his card to the office-boy of Sargent and Company, and was shown at once into the private office of the special partner. Sargent rose to receive him, saying, 'I'm glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. White. There is a comfortable chair. What can I do for you to-day?'

As he said this he gave White a look which took him in through and through. White felt that Sargent had formed at once an opinion of his character, and that this opinion was probably in the main accurate. 'Are we alone,' he asked, 'and secure from interruption?'

Sargent stepped to the door and said to the attending office-boy, 'If anybody calls, just say I have gone.' Then he closed the door and turned the key in the lock. Taking his seat at his desk, he said, 'Now, Mr. White, I am at your service.'

'As I wrote you, Mr. Sargent, I desire a few minutes' talk with you on a matter of great importance,' began White.

'Excuse me a moment,' interrupted Sargent, taking a box of cigars from a drawer in his desk. 'Do you smoke?'

White declined courteously.

'I trust you will excuse me if I light up?'

'Certainly,' said White.

'I never smoke during business hours,' explained Sargent, 'but at three I always indulge myself in a little nicotine.'

White noticed that under cover of the first two or three puffs of smoke the speculator gave him a second penetrating examination. The journalist knew that his task was difficult enough at best, and this little manœuvre seemed to double the difficulty. But his voice did not reveal this feeling as he said:

'The business I have to speak about, Mr. Sargent, is as private as it is important. I am aware that for a moment I may seem to you to be prying, not to say impertinent. I beg to assure you in advance that such is not my intent. If you will bear with me until I am done, I think you will then pardon my apparent intrusion.'

'Fire away,' said Sargent, blowing a series of concentric rings of smoke, 'and put the ball as close to the bull's-eye as you can.'

'What I desire to talk about is the taking of 100,000*l.* in specie from the "Patagonia" on the afternoon of the First of April.'

'Indeed?' queried Sargent, sending forth a final ring of smoke as perfect as any of its predecessors.

'And pray what have I to do with that little speculation in gold?'

'At the time that money was taken you were short of Transcontinental Telegraph stock, and you stood to lose nearly half a million dollars.'

'If you had not warned me that you would be intrusive, I think I should have been able to discover it for myself.'

'Hear me out.'

'I do not see any connection between my private affairs and the "Patagonia" adventure. But go on.'

White continued in the calm voice he had maintained from the beginning of the interview:

'Before that gold could be landed in Nova Scotia there had been a panic here in Wall Street, the bottom had dropped out of Transcontinental Telegraph, your partners had covered your shorts, and you were in a fair way to make a good profit.'

'Well?' asked Sargent, quietly.

'Well—then the gold from the "Patagonia" was restored to its owners.' As he said this, White watched Sargent closely. A second series of vortex rings was in process of construction. Suddenly Sargent turned slightly, and looked White full in the face.

'Mr. White, it is evident that you do not know me. I am a bad man to bluff. I do not choose to understand you insinuendoes, as the darkey called them——'

'I made no insinuations.'

'You have been dropping mysterious hints,' said Sargent, firmly.

'If you have picked them up, why——'

'Just let me tell you, Mr. White, that if you pick me up for a fool, you will lay me down again like a red-hot poker. I see you are driving at something. Now just stop this feeling over the surface and cut to the quick. If you have anything to say, say it out and be done with it.'

'I can put the matter in a nutshell, if you will give me five minutes,' said White, quietly.

'Load your nutshell and touch off the fuse,' answered Sargent, settling back comfortably in his chair.

'My chain is not quite complete, I confess,' began White; 'there are several slight links wanting. But it is strong enough. Here is my story: When the "Patagonia" sailed from Queenstown with 100,000*l.* on board, you were in urgent need of about $500,000. Owing to the unexpected detention of Mr. Joshua Hoffman in this city, you were the sole passenger on the "Rhadamanthus" when she cleared from New York for Bermuda. The crew of the "Rhadamanthus" were Lascars. The captain was under great obligations to you, and would do anything for you.'

Here White remarked that Sargent gave him a quick look as who should say, 'How came you to know that?'

'Instead of going directly to Bermuda, you made for the Banks of Newfoundland. On the

voyage up you rigged a false funnel on the "Rhadamanthus," you built false bulwarks, and you mounted a Quaker gun amidships.'

Again White caught the same quick look, as though Sargent, in spite of his self-control, was surprised at the accuracy of White's information.

'You arrived off the Banks just in time to intercept the "Patagonia." You fired across her bows with the little gun of the yacht. You pretended to load the Quaker gun. You sent a message to the captain of the "Patagonia"—a message written by a type-writer bought by Joshua Hoffman the day before the yacht sailed. You stained your face and put on a false beard, and you yourself sat in the stern-sheets of the gig which was rowed out to receive the gold. When you left the "Patagonia," as night fell, you steamed straight for the little place which Captain Mills owns on the coast of Nova Scotia near Halifax. You landed the gold at his private dock by night: fortunately for you, no custom-house official caught sight of you. Whether you had intended to take the gold and fly, or whether you meant to use it to pay your losses in the Transcontinental Telegraph corner, I do not know. But when you touched land you got the news of the panic here, and of the fall in the price of Transcontinental Telegraph. No longer needing the money, you determined to return it, and to let the affair pass off as a practical joke appropriate to the First of April. Mrs. Mills took the cases to Halifax, and saw that they were forwarded

to New York. Then you took the yacht to Bermuda as fast as she could steam, getting there long before Mr. Joshua Hoffman arrived on the regular steamer. No one in Bermuda connected the "Rhadamanthus" with the "Dare-Devil," because no one knew anything about the temporary robbery of the 'Patagonia' until the arrival of the mail. There is no telegraph to Bermuda. The gold having been returned to its owners, you thought there would be no motive for pursuit and for prosecution. You believed that the whole matter would blow over, and that long before you got back to New York people would have something else to talk about than the adventure of the "Patagonia." For further safety you have persuaded Mr. Joshua Hoffman to send the "Rhadamanthus" to Rio Janeiro to bring back the boy-naturalist who has been making collections along the Amazon. She passed Sandy Hook about six hours ago.'

As White paused here, Sargent swung around in his chair and took another cigar from the box in the drawer of his desk. 'Have you finished?' he asked.

'I have finished,' answered White. 'As you requested, I have told my tale as briefly as possible. But I have written it out in full, setting down all the facts in order, and giving dates and figures as exactly as I could. Perhaps you would like to glance over it.'

Sargent took the flat little bundle of papers which White held out to him, and dropped it into

his pocket. He lighted his second cigar from the first. Then he said, pleasantly: 'This is a very pretty little ghost story of yours, Mr. White, but do you think you can get anybody to take any stock in it?'

'I believe the public will take an interest in it —if——'

'If?' asked Sargent, with his cigar in the air.

'If I publish it.'

'Ah, *if* you publish it.' And Sargent smiled meaningly, and the whole expression of his face changed at once. 'Very well. How much?'

'I beg your pardon?' said White, interrogatively.

'How much do you want?'

'Mr. Sargent!' and White rose to his feet, indignantly.

'Sit down again, Mr. White; we are talking business now. How much do you want to suppress this story?'

White clinched the back of the chair firmly in his hand, and said, 'I did not expect to be insulted by the offer of a paltry bribe.'

'Who said anything about a *paltry* bribe? I asked you how much?'

By this time White had recovered his temper. He sat down again. 'You do not know me if you think I am to be bought, Mr. Sargent. I am hesitating as to the publication of the facts in this case because I am not yet quite clear in my own mind as to my duty in the matter.'

'Indeed?' there was a covert sneer in Sargent's manner as he dropped this one word.

'Perhaps self-interest might resolve my doubts,' continued White. 'Perhaps I could more readily make up my mind to say nothing about your connection with the affair of the "Patagonia" if——'

'If——?' repeated Sargent.

'If I felt jealous of your reputation on my own account—in short, if I were a member of your family.'

'You don't want me to adopt you, do you?' asked Sargent, brusquely.

'No, not exactly,' answered White, hesitating, now he had reached the point. 'But I want to marry your daughter.'

Sargent looked at him in silent astonishment. Then he whistled. 'You want to marry my daughter?'

'Yes.'

'Then the main question is not what I think, but what she thinks. Does she want to marry you?'

'She told me so the last time I saw her,' said White, quietly.

Sargent stood up in his surprise. But all he said was, 'What?'

'I asked her to marry me, and she promised to do so—if you would consent.'

'Ah,' said Sargent; 'so you are engaged?'

'Yes,' we are engaged,' answered White.

'But I have always told Dorothy that I would

never consent to her marrying anybody. I want her myself. I do not wish her to leave me.'

'That's what she told me.'

'And yet she has engaged herself to you?'

'We are engaged—yes; but we shall not be married until you give your consent.'

'And you expect me to yield?' asked Sargent, harshly.

'That's why I came to see you to-day,' answered White, gently.

'Well, you are the cheekiest young fellow I ever saw.' And Sargent sat down again, and struck a match to relight his cigar.

White asked anxiously, 'Will you consent?'

Sargent took two or three puffs at his cigar, and replied: 'Of course. I have to consent. That girl makes me do what she pleases. I have never refused her anything yet. If she wants you for a husband, she shall have you.'

'Thank you——' began White.

'You needn't thank me,' interrupted Sargent; 'you had better go and thank her, and tell her you are going to dine with us to-day.'

As Sargent and White came down the stairs of the Bowdoin Building a begging peddler jostled against the speculator, who cursed him cheerfully, and then gave him a quarter. At the foot of the stairs White met Eliphalet Duncan, who was just going up to his office. He felt so happy that he stopped Duncan to tell him he was engaged to

be married, and to ask him if he could guess to whom.

'Of course,' answered Duncan—'to Miss Sargent.'

Then Sargent and White walked on, and Duncan went upstairs. As he came to the first landing he saw a flat little bundle of paper. He picked it up, and took it into his office for examination, to see if he might discover its owner.

In September, at Newport, toward the end of the waning season, and just before those who are always in the thick of gaiety and fashion abandoned Newport for Lenox, there was a wedding. Dorothy Sargent and Robert White were married.

Sam Sargent, left alone, turned to politics with his wonted energy. On the evening after his interview with White in April he had had a bad quarter of an hour, for he could not find the full and detailed statement of the 'Patagonia' affair which White had given, and which he could have sworn he put in his pocket. For a while he did not dare give rein to his ambition. If this paper had fallen into the hands of a political enemy, his election to any office became impossible. But as time passed on and he got no news of the missing document, he began to hope that it had been destroyed without examination. A few days after his daughter's wedding he received the nomination for Congress for which he had intrigued un-

ceasingly, and he had made a pungent little speech accepting the honour.

The next evening the sword of Damocles fell. He received a short, sharp note bidding him find some excuse at once for declining the nomination, or the exact truth would be published concerning his connection with the robbery of the 'Patagonia' on the First of April. As Sam Sargent read this he knew of a certainty that he had a guardian enemy, and that his political career was at an end for ever. He took up the fatal missive to read it again, and for the first time he noticed that it was written on a type-writer, and that it was signed 'Lafitte.'

'LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT'

'LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.'

A DOUBTFUL day of mingled snow and rain, such as we often have in New York in February, had been followed, as night fell, by a hard frost; and as Robert White mounted the broad brown-stone steps of Mrs. Martin's house and, after ringing the bell, looked across Washington Square to the pseudo-picturesque University building, he felt that form of gratitude toward his hostess which has been defined as a lively sense of benefits to come. His ten-minute walk through the hard slush of the pavements had given an edge to his appetite, and he knew of old that the little dinners of the Duchess of Washington Square were everything that little dinners should be. He anticipated confidently a warm reception by his hospitable hostess; an introduction to a pretty girl, probably as clever as she was good-looking; a dignified procession into the spacious dining-room; a bountiful dinner, neither too long nor too short; as well served as it was well cooked; and at the end a good cup of coffee and a good cigar, and a pleasant quarter of an hour's chat with four or five agreeable men, not the least agreeable of them being Mr. Martin, who

was known to most people only as Mrs. Martin's husband, but whom White had discovered to be as shrewd and sharp as he was reserved and retiring.

And so it came to pass, except that the state of the streets had made White a little late, wherefore the Duchess was slightly hurried and peremptory. She took him at once under her wing and led him up to a very pretty girl. 'Phyllis,' she said, 'this is Mr. White, to whom I confide you for the evening.'

As White bowed before the young lady whom Mrs. Martin had called Phyllis, he wished that the Duchess had kindly added her patronymic, as it is most embarrassing not to know to whom one is talking. But there was no time for inquiry; the rich velvet curtains which masked the open doorway leading from the parlour into the hall were pushed aside, and the venerable coloured butler announced that dinner was served. White offered his arm to Miss Phyllis, and they filed into the dining-room in the wake of Mr. Martin and Mrs. Sutton; the Duchess, on the arm of Judge Gillespie, brought up the rear.

There were fourteen at table,—a number too large for general conversation, and therefore conducive to confidential talks between any two congenial spirits who might be sitting side by side. White had at his left Mrs. Sutton, but she was a great favourite with Mr. Martin, and White had scarcely a word with her throughout the dinner. On the other side of Miss Phyllis was a thin, short,

dyspeptic little man, Mr. C. Mather Hitchcock, whom White knew slightly, and whom Miss Phyllis evidently did not like, as White saw at a glance. So it happened that White and Miss Phyllis were wholly dependent on each other for entertainment as long as they might sit side by side at the Duchess's table.

'A mean day like this makes the comfortable luxury of a house like Mrs. Martin's all the more grateful,' began White, by way of breaking the ice; 'don't you think so?'

'It has been a day to make one understand what weather-prophets have in mind when they talk about the average mean temperature of New York,' she answered, smiling.

'I hope you do not wish to insinuate that the average temperature of New York is mean. I have lived here only a few years, but I am prepared to defend the climate of New York to the bitter end.'

'Then you must defend the weather of to-day,' she retorted gaily, 'for it had a very bitter end. I felt like the maid in the garden hanging out the clothes, for down came a black wind to bite off my nose.'

'Just now you remind me rather of the queen in the parlour eating bread and honey.'

'I have an easy retort,' she laughed back. 'I can say you are like the king in his chamber counting out his money: for that is how most New York men seem to spend their days.'

'But I am not a business man,' explained White, thinking that Miss Phyllis was a ready young lady with her wits about her, and regretting again that he had not learnt her name.

'They say that there are only two classes who scorn business and never work—the aristocrats and the tramps,' she rejoined mischievously. 'Am I to infer that you are an aristocrat or a tramp?'

'I regret to say that I am neither the one nor the other. A tramp is often a philosopher—of the peripatetic school of course; and an aristocrat is generally a gentleman, and often a good fellow. No, I am afraid your inference was based on a false premise. I am not a business man, but, all the same, I earn my living by my daily work. I am a journalist, and I am on the staff of the "Gotham Gazette."'

'Oh, you are an editor? I am so glad. I have always wanted to see an editor,' ejaculated Miss Phyllis with increasing interest.

'You may see one now,' he answered. 'I am on exhibition here from seven to nine to-night.'

'And you are really an editor?' she queried, gazing at him curiously.

'I am a journalist and I write brevier, so I suppose I may be considered as a component unit of the editorial plural,' he replied.

'And you write editorials?'

'I do; I have written yards of them—I might almost say miles of them.'

'How odd! Somehow the editorials of a great

paper always remind me of the edicts of the Council of Ten in Venice—nobody knows whose they are, and yet all men tremble before them.' As she said this, Miss Phyllis looked at him meditatively for a moment, and then she went on, impulsively, 'And what puzzles me is how you ever find anything to say!'

A quiet smile played over White's face as he answered gravely, 'We have to write a good deal, but we do not always say anything in particular.'

'When I read the telegrams,' continued Miss Phyllis, 'especially the political ones, I never know exactly what it's all about until I've read the editorial. Then, of course, it all seems clear enough. But *you* have to make all that up out of your own head. It must be very wearing.'

The young journalist wondered for a second whether this was sarcasm or not; then he admitted that he had been using up the gray matter of his brain very rapidly of late.

'I know I exhausted myself one election,' she went on, 'when I tried to understand politics. I thought it my duty to hear both sides, so I read two papers. But they contradicted each other so, and they got me so confused, that I had to give it up. Really I hadn't any peace of mind at all until I stopped reading the other paper. Of course I couldn't do without the "Gotham Gazette."'

'Then are all our labours amply rewarded?' said White gallantly, thinking that he had only once met a young lady more charming than Miss Phyllis.

'Now tell me, Mr. White, what part of the paper do you write?'

'Tell me what part of the paper you read first—but I think I can guess that. You always begin with the deaths and then pass on to the marriages. Don't you?'

Miss Phyllis hesitated a moment, blushed a little,—whereat White thought her even prettier than he had at first,—and then confessed. 'I do read the deaths first; and why not? Our going out of the world is the most important thing we do in it.'

'Except getting married—and that's why you read the marriages next?' he asked.

'I suppose so. I acknowledge that I read the marriages with delight. Naturally I know very few of the brides, but that is no matter—there is all the more room for pleasant speculation. It's like reading only the last chapter of a novel—you have to invent for yourself all that went before.'

'Then you like the old-fashioned novels, which always ended like the fairy stories, "So they were married and lived happily ever afterward?"' he queried.

'Indeed I do,' she answered vehemently. 'Unless I have orange-blossoms and wedding-cake given to me at the end of a story, I feel cheated.'

'I suppose you insist on a novel's being a love-story?' White inquired.

'If a story isn't a love-story,' she answered energetically, 'it isn't a story at all. Why, when I

was only nine years old, a little chit of a girl, I wouldn't read Sunday-School books, because there was no love in them!'

Robert White laughed gently, and said, 'I spurned the Sunday-school book when I was nine too, but that was because the bad boys had all the fun and the good boys had to take all the medicine, in spite of which, however, they were often cut off in the flower of their youth.'

'Do you ever write stories, Mr. White?'

'I have been guilty of that evil deed,' he answered. 'I had a tale in the "Gotham Gazette" one Sunday a few months ago, called "The Parrot that Talked in his Sleep"; it was a little study in zoölogic psychology. Did you read it?'

'I don't seem to recall it,' she hesitated. 'I'm afraid I must have missed it.'

'Then you missed a great intellectual treat,' said the journalist, with humorous exaggeration. 'Fiction is stranger than truth sometimes, and there were absolutely no facts at all in "The Parrot that Talked in his Sleep."'

'It was a fantastic tale, then?'

'Well, it was rather eccentric.'

'You must send it to me. I like strange, weird stories—if they do not try to be funny. They say I haven't any sense of humour, and I certainly do not like to see anybody trying hard to be funny.'

With a distinct recollection that 'The Parrot that Talked in his Sleep' had been noticed by several friendly editors as 'one of the most amusing

and comical conceits ever perpetrated in America,' White thought it best not to promise a copy of it to Miss Phyllis.

'Perhaps you would prefer another sketch I published in the "Gotham Gazette,"' he ventured. 'It was called "At the End of his Tether," and it described a quaint old man who gave up his life to the collecting of bits of the ropes which had hanged famous murderers.'

'How gruesome!' she exclaimed, with a little shudder, although the next minute she asked with interest: 'And what did he do with them?'

'He arranged them with great care, and labelled them exactly, and gloated over them until his mind gave way, and then he spliced them together and hung himself on a gallows of his own inventing.'

'How delightfully interesting!'

'It was a little sketch after Hawthorne—a long way after,' he added modestly.

'I just doat on Hawthorne,' remarked Miss Phyllis critically. 'He never explains things, and so you have more room for guessing. I do hate to see everything spelt out plain at the end of a book. I'm satisfied to know that they got married and were happy, and I don't care to be told just how old their children were when they had the whooping-cough!'

'A hint is as good as a table of statistics to a sharp reader,' said the journalist. 'I think the times are ripe for an application to fiction of the methods Corot used in painting pictures. Father

Corot, as the artists call him, gave us a firm and vigorous conception veiled by a haze of artistic vagueness.'

'That's what I like,' agreed Miss Phyllis. 'I like something left to the imagination.'

'Your approbation encourages me to persevere. I had planned half-a-dozen other unconventional tales, mere trifles, of course, as slight as possible in themselves, but enough with "The Parrot that Talked in his Sleep," and "At the End of his Tether," to make a little book, and I was going to call it "Nightmare's Nests."'

'What an appetising title!' declared the young lady. 'I'm so sorry it is not published now—I couldn't rest till I'd read it.'

'Then I am sure of selling at least one copy.'

'Oh, I should expect you to send me a copy yourself,' said Miss Phyllis archly, 'and to write "with the compliments of the author" on the first page.'

Robert White looked up with a smile, and he caught Miss Phyllis's eye. He noted her bright and animated expression. He thought that only once before had he ever met a prettier or a livelier girl.

'You shall have an early copy,' he said, 'a set of "advance sheets," as the phrase is.'

Here his attention and hers was distracted by the passing of a wonderful preparation of lobster served in sherry, and cooked as though it were terrapin; this was a speciality of the Duchess's

Virginian cook, and was not to be treated lightly When this delicacy had been duly considered, Miss Phyllis turned to him again.

'Can't you tell me one of the stories you are going to write?' she asked.

'Here—now—at table?'

'Yes; why not?'

'Do you play chess? I mean do you understand the game?'

'I think it is poky; but I have played it with grandpa.'

'There is a tale I thought of writing, to be called "The Queen of the Living Chessmen"; but——'

'That's a splendid title. Go on.'

'Are you sure it would interest you?' asked the author.

'I can't be sure until you begin,' she answered airily; 'and if it doesn't interest me, I'll change the subject.'

'And we can talk about the weather.'

'Precisely. And now, do go on!'

She gave an imperious nod, which White could not but consider charming. There was no lull in the general conversation around the table. Mr. Martin was monopolising Mrs. Sutton's attention, and Mr. C. Mather Hitchcock had at last got into an animated discussion with the lady on the other side of him. So White began.

'This, then, is the tale of "The Queen of the Living Chessmen." Once upon a time——'

'I do like stories which begin with "Once upon a time,"' interrupted Miss Phyllis.

'So far, at least, then, you may like mine. Once upon a time there was a young English surgeon in India. He was a fine, handsome, manly young fellow——'

'Light or dark?' asked the young lady. 'That's a very important question. I don't take half the interest in a hero if he is dark.'

'Then my hero shall be as fair as a young Saxon ought to be. Now, on his way out to India this young fellow heard a great deal about a beautiful English girl, the daughter of a high official in the service of John Company——'

'Is she going to fall in love with him?' interrupted Miss Phyllis again.

'She is.'

'Then this is a love-story?'

'It is indeed,' answered the author, with emphasis.

'Then you may go on,' said the young lady; 'I think it will interest me.'

And White continued:

'The young doctor had heard so much about her beauty that he was burning with anxiety to behold her. He felt as though the first time he should see her would be an epoch in his life. He was ready to love her at first sight. But when he got to his post he found that she had gone to Calcutta for a long visit, and it might be months before she returned. He possessed his soul in

patience, and made friends with her father, and was permitted to inspect a miniature of her, made by the best artist in India. This portrait more than confirmed the tales of her beauty. The sight of her picture produced a strange but powerful effect upon the doctor, and his desire to see the fair original redoubled. From Calcutta came rumours of the havoc she wrought there among the susceptible hearts of the English exiles, but so far as rumour could tell she herself was still heart-free. She had not yet found the man of her choice ; and it was said that she had romantic notions, and would marry only a man who had proved himself worthy, who had, in short, done some deed of daring or determination on her behalf. The young Englishman listened to these rumours with a sinking of the heart, for he had no hope that he could ever do anything to deserve her. At last the news came that she was about to return to her father, and at the same time came an order to the doctor to join an expedition among the hill-tribes. He called on her father before he went, and he got a long look at her miniature, and away he went with a heavy heart for the love he bore a woman he had never seen. No sooner had his party set off than there was trouble with the Hindoos. The British residents and the native princes led a cat-and-dog life, and there began to be great danger of civil war. There were risings in various parts of the country.'

'In what year was this?'

'I don't know yet,' answered the journalist. 'You see I have only the general idea of the story. I shall have to read up a good deal to get the historical facts and all the little touches of local colour. But I suppose this must have been about a hundred years ago or thereabouts. Will that do?'

'If you don't *know* when your story happened,' said Miss Phyllis, 'of course you can't tell me. But go on, and tell me all you *do* know.'

'Well, the young doctor was captured by a party of natives and taken before a rajah, or whatever they call him, a native prince, who had renounced his semi-allegiance to the British and who had at once revealed his cruelty and rapacity. In fact, the chief into whose hands the young surgeon had fallen was nothing more nor less than a bloodthirsty tyrant. At first he was going to put the doctor to death, but fortunately, just then, one of the lights of the harem fell ill and the doctor cured her. So, instead of being killed, he was made first favourite of the rajah. He had saved his life, although he was no nearer to his liberty.'

'Why, wouldn't the rajah let him go?' asked Miss Phyllis with interest.

'No, he wanted to keep him. He had found it useful to have a physician on the premises, and in future he never meant to be without one. After a few vain appeals, the doctor gave up asking for his liberty. He began to plan an escape without

the rajah's leave. One evening the long-sought opportunity arrived, and as a large detachment of English prisoners was brought into town, the doctor slipped out.'

'Did he get away safely?'

'You shall be told in due time. Let us not anticipate, as the story-tellers say. Did I tell you that the rajah had found out that the doctor played chess, and that he had three games with him every night?'

'This is the first I have heard of it,' was the young lady's answer.

'Such was the fact. And this it was which led to the doctor's recapture. On the evening of his escape the rajah wanted his chess a little earlier, and the doctor could not be found; so they scoured the country for him, and brought him before the prince, who bade them load him with chains and cast him into a dungeon cell.'

'And how long did he languish there?'

'Till the next morning only. At high noon he was taken out and the chains were taken off, and he was led into a spacious balcony overlooking a great court-yard. This court-yard was thronged with people and the sides were lined with soldiers. In the centre was a large vacant space. This vacant space was a square composed of many smaller squares of alternating black and white marble. Unconsciously the doctor counted these smaller squares; there were exactly sixty-four—eight in a row and eight rows.'

'Just as though it was a huge chess-board?' inquired Miss Phyllis.

White was flattered by the visible interest this pretty girl took in his narrative.

'It *was* a huge chess-board, nothing else,' he answered, 'and a game of chess was about to be played on it by living chess-men. Soon after the doctor was brought into the gallery, there was a movement in the outskirts of the throng below, and four elephants came in and took their places at the four corners of the gigantic chess-board. Two of these elephants were draped with white and two with black, and their howdahs were shaped like castles. Then came in four horsemen, two on white steeds and two on black, and they took their places next to the castles.'

'They were the knights! Oh, how romantic!' ejaculated the young lady.

'Next came four fools or jesters, for in the Oriental game of chess the bishop is replaced by a clown. Two of these were white men and two were Hindoos. They took their places next to the knights. Then there entered two files of eight soldiers, and the eight white men took the second row on one side while the eight Hindoos faced them on the second row opposite.'

'They were the pawns, I suppose?'

'They were the pawns. The doctor now began to suspect what was going on, and he saw a white man and a Hindoo, both magnificently caparisoned, and with tiny pages supporting the skirts of their

robes, enter the square allotted to the kings. Finally in two litters or sedan-chairs the two queens were borne in; the doctor saw that one was a white woman and the other a Hindoo, but the white pieces were on the side of the court opposite him, and he could not distinguish the features of any of his countrymen—for that they were English captives he felt convinced.'

'But who was to play the game?' asked Miss Phyllis eagerly.

'The rajah and the doctor. The rajah came into the balcony and told the doctor that since he wanted to get away he might have a chance for his life. If he could win the game, the rajah would not only spare his life, but he might depart in peace, and even more, he might select from the English captives any one he chose to depart with him.'

'But if he lost the game?'

'Then he lost his life. For the doctor that game of chess with the living chessmen meant life or death. But the sturdy young Englishman had a stout heart and a strong head, and he was not frightened. Although he had generally managed to lose when playing with the rajah, he knew that he played a finer game. He knew, moreover, that although the rajah was a despot and a bloody-minded villain, yet he would keep his word, and if he lost the game the doctor would be sent away in safety and honour, as had been promised. So the doctor planned his game with

care and played with more skill than the rajah had suspected him of having. After half a dozen moves there was an exchange of pawns. The captured men were led to the sides of the court-yard, and there stood an executioner, who whipped off their heads in a second.'

'What!' almost shouted Miss Phyllis. 'Do you mean to say he killed them?'

'The living chess-men, white or black, English or Hindoo, were all prisoners and had all been condemned to death. The rajah was using them for his amusement before killing them—that was all. As soon as they were taken in the course of the game, they were no longer useful, and the headsman did his work upon them at once.'

'You don't call *this* a love-story, do you?' was Miss Phyllis's indignant query.

'You shall see. When the doctor saw the fate of the captured pieces he almost lost his self-control. But he was a brave man, and in a little while he regained courage. An attendant explained that these men would die anyhow, and in time the doctor got interested in the game and intent on saving his own life, and he ceased to think about the lives of the hapless human chess-men. And the rajah gave him enough to think about. The rajah, having nothing at stake, and knowing it was the last game with the doctor, played with unusual skill and success. With Oriental irony the rajah had chosen the white pieces, and he kept sending the white queen on predatory excursions among

the black chessmen. The doctor saw that if he did not take the white queen he was a dead man; so he laid a trap for her, and the rajah fell into the trap and sent the white queen close to the black pieces, taking a black pawn. For the first time the doctor got a good look at the white queen. His heart jumped into his mouth and beat so loud that he thought the rajah must hear it. The white queen was the beautiful English girl of whom he had thought so much and so often, and whom he had never seen. He knew her at a glance, for the miniature was a good likeness, though it could not do justice to her wonderful beauty; it was indeed fit that she should be robed as a queen. As soon as the doctor saw her he felt that he loved her with the whole force of his being; no stroke of love at first sight was ever more sudden or more irresistible. For a moment love, astonishment, and fear made him stand motionless.'

'And what did she do?'

'She could do nothing. And what could he do? It was a tremendous predicament. If he captured the white queen, she would be killed at once. If he did not capture her, the rajah in all probability would win the game—and then both he and she would have to die. He had a double incentive to win the game, to save his own life and to save hers also, by selecting her as the one to accompany him. But the game became doubly difficult to win, because he dare not take the rajah's most powerful piece. To make the situation more hopeless, the

rajah, seeing that the doctor let him withdraw the queen from a position the full danger of which he discovered as soon as the move was made, and detecting the signals with which the doctor tried to encourage the woman he loved, and to bid her be of good cheer—the rajah began to count on the doctor's unwillingness to take the white queen; he made rash raids into the doctor's intrenchments and decimated the doctor's slender force. In half an hour the game looked hopeless for the young Englishman. Less than half of the thirty-two living chessmen stood upon the marble squares, and of these barely a third belonged to the doctor. The rajah had the advantage in numbers, in value, and in position.'

'Then how did the doctor get out of it?'

'The rajah's success overcame his prudence, and he made a first false move. The doctor saw a slight chance, and he studied it out as though it were an ordinary end game or a problem. Suddenly the solution burst upon him. In three swift moves he checkmated the astonished rajah.'

'And saved his own life and hers too?' asked the young lady, with great interest.

'So they were married and lived happily ever afterwards. You see my love story ends as you like them to end.'

'It's all very well,' said Miss Phyllis, 'but the man did everything. I think she ought to have had a chance too.'

It must not be supposed that there had been any break in the continuous courses of Mrs.

Martin's delightful dinner while White was telling the tale of 'The Queen of the Living Chess-men.' In fact, he was unable to answer this last remark of Miss Phyllis's as he was helping himself to a delicious *mayonnaise* of tomatoes, another speciality of the Duchess's, who always served it as a self-respecting *mayonnaise* should be served—in a shallow glass dish imbedded in the cracked ice which filled a deeper dish of silver. So the young lady had a chance to continue.

'I do not object to the bloodshed and murder and horrors in your story, of course. I don't mean that I *like* horrors, as some girls do, but I am not squeamish about them. What I don't like is your heroine; she doesn't *do* anything.'

'She is loved,' answered the author; 'is not that sufficient?'

'You *say* she is loved, but how do I know that she loves back? I have only your word for it; and you are a man, and so, of course, you may be mistaken in such matters.'

'What more could I do to convince you of her affection for her lover?'

'You needn't do anything, but you ought to have let her do something. I don't know what, but I feel she ought to have done a deed of some sort, something grand, heroic, noble,—something to make my blood run cold with the intensity of my admiration! I'd like to see her sacrifice her life for the man she loves.'

'You want a Jeanne d'Arc for a heroine?'

'Rather a Mary Queen of Scots, eager to love and to be loved, and ready to do and to die—a woman with an active spirit, and not a mere passive doll, like the weak girl your doctor married.'

Robert White remarked that her slight excitement had heightened her colour, and that the flush was very becoming to her.

'We shall have to go back,' he said, 'to the days of Rebecca and Rowena, if you insist on having lissome maidens and burly warriors, hurtling arrows and glinting armour, the flash of scarlet and the blare of the trumpet.'

'I don't think so,' she retorted; 'there is heroism in modern life, and in plenty too, though it goes about gravely and in sad-coloured garments. And besides,' she added, changing the subject with feminine readiness, 'you tell us only about the peril they were in, and nothing at all about their love-making. Now, that's the part I like best. I just delight in a good love-scene. I used to wade through Trollope's interminable serials just for the sake of the proposals.'

'It is never too early to mend. I will take your advice, and work up the love interest more. I will show how it was that the young English beauty who was "The Queen of the Living Chessmen" came in time and by slow degrees to confess that the young doctor was the king of her heart.'

'Then I will read it with even more pleasure.'

'But, do you know,' he continued, dropping his mock-heroic intonation, 'that it is not easy to

shoot Cupid on the wing? Indeed, it is very difficult to write about love-making.'

'From lack of experience?' inquired Miss Phyllis mischievously.

'Precisely so. Now, how does a man propose?' asked White innocently.

The flush of excitement had faded before this, but suddenly a rich blush mantled her face and neck. For a second she hesitated; then she looked up at White frankly, and said, 'Don't you know?'

Under her direct gaze it was his turn to flush up, and he coloured to the roots of his hair.

'Pray forgive me if I have seemed personal,' he said, 'but I had supposed a young lady's opportunities for observation were so many more than a man's, that I hoped you might be willing to help me.'

'I think that perhaps you are right,' she replied calmly, 'and that "The Queen of the Living Chess-men" will be interesting enough without any love-passages.'

'But I have other stories,' he rejoined eagerly; 'there is one in particular,—it is a love-story, simply a love-story.'

'That will be very nice indeed,' she said seriously, and as though her mind had been recalled suddenly.

'I am going to call it "Love at First Sight." You believe in love at first sight, don't you?'

Again the quick blush crimsoned her face. 'I—I don't quite know,' she answered.

'I thought all young ladies maintained as an article of faith, without which there could be no salvation, that love at first sight was the only genuine love?'

'I do not know what other girls may think,' said Miss Phyllis, with cold dignity, 'but I have no such foolish ideas!'

White was about to continue the conversation, and to ask her for such hints as she might be able to afford him toward the writing of 'Love at First Sight,' when the Duchess gave the signal for the departure of the ladies. As Miss Phyllis rose White fancied that he caught a faint sigh of relief, and as he lifted back her chair he wondered whether he had been in any way intrusive. She bowed to him as she passed, with the brilliant smile which was, perhaps, her greatest charm. As she left the room his eyes followed her with strange interest. The heavy curtain fell behind the portly back of the Duchess, and the gentlemen were left to their coffee and to their cigars; but Mat Hitchcock took the chair next to White's, and began at once to talk about himself in his usual effusive manner. The aroma of the coffee and the flavour of his cigar were thus quite spoilt for White, who seized the first opportunity to escape from Hitchcock and to join the ladies. As he entered the spacious parlour Hitchcock captured him again, and although White was able to mitigate the infliction by including two or three other guests in the conversation, it was not until the party began to break up that he

could altogether shake off the incubus. Then he saw Miss Phyllis just gliding out of the door, after having bade the Duchess a fond farewell.

Robert White crossed over to Mrs. Martin at once. 'I have to thank you for a very delightful evening,' he began. 'The dinner was a poem,—if you will excuse the brutality of the compliment,—and the company were worthy of it—with one unworthy exception, of course.'

'Oh, Mr. White, you flatter me,' said the pleased Duchess.

'Indeed, I do not. Very rarely have I heard such clever talk——'

'Yes,' interrupted Mrs. Martin. 'I do like the society of intellectual people.'

'And,' continued White, 'I quite lost my heart to the very pretty girl I took in to dinner.'

'Isn't she charming?' asked Mrs. Martin enthusiastically. 'I think she is the nicest girl in New York.'

'By the way—do you know, I did not quite catch her name——'

'Hadn't you ever met before? Why, she is the daughter of old Judge Van Rensselaer. You must have heard me talk of Baby Van Rensselaer, as I always call her? She's engaged to Delancey Jones, you know. It's just out. She didn't like him at first, I believe, and she refused him. But he offered himself again just after we all got back from Europe this fall, and now she's desperately in love with him. Dear Jones would have been here

to-night, of course, but he's in Boston building a flat, so I put you in his seat at table. You know Dear Jones, don't you?' And the Duchess paused for a reply.

'Mr. Jones is a cousin of Miss Sargent's, I think——' began White.

'Of Miss Dorothy Sargent? Of course he is. Sam Sargent married his mother's sister. Dorothy's a dear, good girl, isn't she? Do you know her?'

At last White had his chance.

'She is a great friend of mine,' he said, blushing slightly; 'in fact, although it is not yet announced generally, I do not mind telling *you*, Mrs. Martin, that she's engaged to be married.'

'Dorothy Sargent engaged to be married?' cried the Duchess, delighted at a bit of matrimonial news. 'And to whom?'

'To me,' said Robert White.

BRIEF—AS WOMAN'S LOVE

BRIEF—AS WOMAN'S LOVE.

THE imperial will of Napoleon III. decreed, and the ruthless hand of Baron Haussmann traced, a broad street to connect the two great monuments of the histrionic art of France—the Comédie Française and the Opéra—and the resulting Avenue de l'Opéra, not finished until long after the Emperor and the Prefect who planned it had fallen from power for ever, is now a full artery of finance and of fashion. On the right hand side of this thoroughfare, as one walks from the home of French comedy to the temple of French music, and not far from the Rue de la Paix, there is a restaurant called the Café de Paris; and here in a private room, one afternoon early in June, were gathered three Americans, just about to begin their lunch. They had fallen into the French habit of getting through the morning with no other nourishment than a roll and a cup of coffee, so that they were wont to find themselves ready for a more ample mid-day breakfast shortly after twelve. The low ceiling of the *entresol* seemed to make the room in which they sat smaller than it was in reality; but there was ample space for the fourth member

of the party, for whom they were then waiting. The melon was on the table, and the *sole à la Mornay*—a speciality of the Café de Paris—had been ordered, but still Dr. Cheever did not come.

Mr. Laurence Laughton crossed over to the window by Mrs. Rudolph Vernon. 'I hope you are not very hungry?' he said.

'But I am,' she answered; 'I am famished.'

'So am I,' added her husband.

'Your conduct is unreasonable, and your feelings are reprehensible,' retorted Mr. Laughton. 'As a lady, Mrs. Vernon has no right to an appetite; and as a poet, Mr. Vernon should scorn the gross joys of the table.'

'The idea!' answered Mrs. Vernon. 'Just as if a woman could live on air! Why, Uncle Larry, I am hungry enough to eat you.'

Uncle Larry arose quietly, and slyly put the table between himself and the young lady who had thus proclaimed her cannibalistic capacity. But this movement brought him close to her husband, who seized the opportunity.

'I say, Laughton,' he began, 'it is all very well to be a poet, but I am a practical man too, and as a practical man I am simply starving.'

'Well,' said Uncle Larry, 'you will enjoy that *sole à la Mornay* all the more. If it is as good now as it was last year, it is a poem, and it is worthy to be embalmed in verse. I believe that is the phrase they use, isn't it?'

'And it's a disgusting expression too, I say,'

interposed Mrs. Vernon. 'I don't like to think of Rudolph as an undertaker. It's bad enough to have a doctor for a brother.'

'By the way, my dear,' interrupted her husband, 'are you sure that you told the doctor to meet us here?'

'Of course I am,' she answered. 'He went to the banker's for letters from home while I was putting on my hat to go out, and he sent back a message to say that he had business, and couldn't go to the Salon with us, and I told the messenger to tell him to meet us here to lunch at one o'clock.'

'And it is now nearly half-past,' said Rudolph Vernon, looking at his watch.

'Suppose we don't wait for him?' suggested Mrs. Vernon. 'You know, Rudolph, that if you go without food it upsets you dreadfully.'

'Well,' said Uncle Larry, 'I confess I heard the dumb dinner-bell of hunger some time ago.'

'Dumb dinner-bell of hunger?' repeated the poet, thoughtfully. 'It is a neat figure, but scarcely sufficiently dignified for use—except, perhaps, in comic verse.'

'I should think you would find the pictures in the Salon very valuable to you,' ventured Uncle Larry. 'And it is a pity that the doctor did not get there this morning. Some of the paintings might have been useful to him—as studies in anatomy.'

'They were very indelicate, I thought,' said Mrs. Vernon.

'But I get ideas from them,' continued her poet-husband. 'I took notes for two first-rate sonnets.'

'I saw one picture which suggested a poem to me,' remarked Uncle Larry, with a quiet smile.

'Indeed?' queried Mr. Rudolph Vernon.

'It was one of Henner's, and it was just like all the other Henners I ever saw. It represented a young lady—before the bath. And it seemed to me a perfect illustration of the nursery rhyme:

> 'Oh, mother, may I go in and swim?'
> 'Oh yes, my darling daughter:
> Just hang your clothes on a hickory limb,
> And do not go near the water.'

'How absurd!' laughed Mrs. Vernon.

'Well,' said Uncle Larry, 'it may be absurd, but it is singularly exact. Henner's nymphs have always hung their clothes up, but they never are in the water. Now I believe that——'

But Uncle Larry's artistic creed was cut short by the entrance of Dr. Cheever.

'I hope you have not waited for me?' he began, in a deep, grave voice befitting a physician of his wisdom and reputation.

'But we have!' cried his sister. 'Whatever did keep you so long?'

'I was called out unexpectedly,' he answered quietly, 'and the case proved more important than I had supposed.' Something in his manner warned his sister not to press him further with questions.

'Now you *are* here,' said Uncle Larry, 'we will proceed with our breakfast-at-the-fork, as the French call it.'

'Do you think melon is wholesome to begin a meal with?' asked Vernon.

'Why not?' answered the doctor. 'The French eat it then, and they are not as dyspeptic as we are.'

'The French don't eat pie!' said Uncle Larry, laconically. 'We do. In fact, I have sometimes thought that the typical American might be defined as a travelling interrogation-mark with the dyspepsia.'

'I wonder,' remarked the doctor, as the waiter removed the melon and brought in the *sole à la Mornay*—'I wonder that nobody has ever attempted to explain "Hamlet" by the suggestion that the young Prince Hamlet has acute chronic dyspepsia.'

'By the way, Uncle Larry,' asked Mrs. Vernon, 'you never told me how you liked "Hamlet" at the Opéra last night?'

'Well,' said Uncle Larry, 'a Hamlet who is a Frenchman and who sings, is to me the abomination of desolation. But it is such a great play that even French singing cannot spoil it.'

'The construction of the last act is very feeble,' remarked the professional poet, critically.

'Very violent, you mean,' suggested his wife.

'In art, violence is feebleness. And the fifth act of "Hamlet" is the acme of turbulent muddle.'

Uncle Larry and Dr. Cheever exchanged quick glances as Vernon continued :

'I do not deny that it is a great play, a prophetic play even, and deeply philosophical. Indeed, nowhere is the *Weltschmerz* and the *Zeitgeist* more plainly voiced than in "Hamlet"; but, for all that, the construction of the last act is grossly inartistic.'

'The idea of Ophelia's singing as she floats down the river is absurd,' said Mrs. Vernon, supporting her husband and remembering more accurately the opera of M. Ambroise Thomas than the tragedy of William Shakspere.

'People talk about Shakspere's greatness,' continued Rudolph Vernon, 'and he was great; but look at the chance he had. He came in the nick of time, when men and women had passions, and before all the words were worn out. I'd like to see what Shakspere would do now, when men and women have milk in their veins instead of blood, and when nearly all the fine words in the language are second-hand.'

'You do not believe in a modern Hamlet, then?' asked Dr. Cheever.

'No; nor in a modern Ophelia. Women do not go mad and drown themselves nowadays. If they are jilted by Hamlet they marry Guildenstern or Rosencrantz, or, better yet, young Fortinbras.'

'Oh, Rudolph, how can you be so unjust!' was his wife's protest. 'I am sure that women love with as much passion and self-sacrifice as

ever. Why, at Madame Parlier's Institute for Young Ladies I knew two or three girls quite capable of loving as Juliet did, and of dying like Juliet.'

'You are fortunate in your acquaintance,' answered her husband, 'more fortunate by far than I, for I do not know any Romeo.'

'Man's love to-day has more common-sense,' Dr. Cheever suggested.

'Exactly, more common-sense, and therefore less passion, and a smaller possibility of tragedy. Shakspere had the inside track, and it is no use for us modern poets to hope to equal him.'

'I like to think about the fatality of love, and I hate to hear you say that there are no Romeos in our time,' said Mrs. Vernon. 'It seems to take the romance out of life.'

'But there isn't any romance in life any longer,' rejoined her husband; 'that's my contention. We have and we can have no Hamlet, no Ophelia, no Juliet—especially no Romeo.'

Uncle Larry laughed, and suggested:

'You think a modern lover more likely to take pepsin pills than a deadly poison?'

'I do indeed,' was the poet's answer. Man now thinks more of his stomach than of his heart, and where is the poetry in indigestion, I'd like to know?'

'Well, I don't know,' said Uncle Larry, as the smile faded from his face. 'I believe in the fatality of love even in the nineteenth century. I have seen

one man in love with a passion as profound as any Romeo's, and his end was as tragic.'

'Then he was a man born out of time,' urged Rudolph Vernon.

'That may be,' answered Uncle Larry. 'He was a man born to sorrow, and yet he had the happiest nature and the largest heart of any man I ever knew.'

'Is he dead?' asked Mrs. Vernon with a woman's sympathy. 'When did he die?'

'It is nearly two years since I read the sudden news of his death one summer afternoon. It is two years, and yet he has been in my mind all the morning. It may be because I found his last letter to me yesterday in my portfolio, and I had to read it again. So to-day I seem to see his pale handsome face and his bright dark eyes. He had the nobility of soul which makes the true hero of tragedy.'

'But there is no tragedy to-day, as there is no comedy,' argued Rudolph Vernon. 'Instead, we have only *la tragédie bourgeoise* and *la comédie larmoyante*.'

'I do not think you would say that if you knew his story—the story of his heart and the cause of its breaking,' replied Laurence Laughton. 'To me that is as tragic as anything that ever happened.'

'I do not doubt that,' retorted Vernon, hastily. 'The story of your friend's broken heart may be as tragic as anything that ever *happened*; but in

real life little or nothing happens in the way it ought to happen artistically.'

'That was Balzac's theory,' said Dr. Cheever, in his deep voice.

'You remind one of the French painter Boucher, was it, or Watteau, who complained that nature put him out,' said Uncle Larry.

'Balzac's or Boucher's, the theory is sound for all that,' contended the poet. 'In real life we have only the raw material, and it is crude and harsh, and it has no beginning and no end—in an artistic sense, I mean. It is wholly lacking in symmetry and proportion. And as modern real life is nearest to us, it is the least artistic and the most unfinished.'

'Tell him your story, Mr. Laughton, and confute him on the spot,' suggested the doctor.

'Yes, do tell us, Uncle Larry,' said Mrs. Vernon; 'and then, if it really is tragic, you know, why, perhaps Rudolph can use it in a poem after all.'

'I'm open to conviction, of course,' admitted Vernon, 'and I'd like to hear about your friend's taking off, but I am free to say that I do not believe it is a rounded and harmonious whole. As I said, in real life we can get of necessity only fragments out of a man's life, and a cross section of a fragment is not art.'

Laurence Laughton hesitated a moment. The waiter brought in the coffee, and the gentlemen lighted their cigars.

'It seems almost like sacrilege to the dead to

tell Ralph De Witt's story merely to prove a point,' Laughton began, taking a sharp pull at his tiny cigar. 'But it will free my mind to tell the tale, and it gives me occasion to speak well of him. He was the son of an old friend who had been very kind to me when I was a boy, and I tried to pay to the son the debt of gratitude due to the father. His mother died when he was born, and as an only child his father gave him a double share of love, for himself and for his mother. But when he was only seven years old the battle of Gettysburg was fought, and Lieutenant-Colonel De Witt took command of our regiment after Colonel Delancey Jones had been killed in the first day's fight. As we pressed forward to repel Pickett's charge, De Witt fell from his horse, mortally wounded. He took my hand as I bent over him, and said, "Take care of Ralph." The boy was his last thought, and those were his last words. He had left a will appointing me the boy's guardian, and I do not believe that ever did guardian and ward get on better together than Ralph and I. He was a bright boy, strong, wholesome, manly—a true boy, as he was to be a true man. He worshipped the memory of his father, and in remembrance of his father's death he wanted to be a soldier. At a competitive examination he won his appointment to a cadetship at West Point. He enjoyed his four years of hard work there, and he was graduated first in his

class, going into the Engineers at once as a second lieutenant. Side by side with his enthusiasm for the soldier's calling lay a strong interest in science, and in getting into the Engineers he had accomplished the utmost of his hopes. He had been a happy boy; he had passed four happy years at West Point; and he began life with the prospect of happiness full before him.'

As Laughton paused to light his cigar, which he had suffered to go out, Mrs. Vernon interjected, 'Why, you said it was to be a tragedy, but it begins like a comedy. I can almost hear wedding bells in the distance.'

'Where is the heroine of your tragedy?' asked Vernon.

'Well,' said Uncle Larry, inhaling a mouthful of smoke, 'the heroine is at hand.'

'I am glad of that,' remarked Mrs. Vernon, soaking a lump of sugar in her coffee-spoon. 'I don't like stories of men only; I want to hear about a woman.'

'I do not think you will like the woman when you hear about her,' answered Laughton.

'Why, was she ugly?' asked the lady.

'No; she was almost the most beautiful woman I ever saw; and I have heard you say that she was beautiful.'

'Why, Uncle Larry, have I ever seen her?' inquired Mrs. Vernon, eagerly. 'When was it? and where?'

'You have seen her, but you do not know her,' answered Laughton.

'Oh, how mysterious! Now go on and tell me all about it, and where your friend met her, and what happened.' And Mrs. Vernon lifted her lump of sugar to her lips and settled back on the divan which ran along one wall of the little room.

'Ralph De Witt got leave of absence in the latter part of the summer of 1881, and he came East for a change. Some friends were going to Mount Desert, and he joined them in a trip to that fascinating summer school of philosophy. His friends went away after a week, but he stayed on. The Duchess of Washington Square—you know Mrs. Martin, of course?' And Laughton paused for an answer.

'Oh dear, yes,' laughed Mrs. Vernon. 'Everybody knows the Duchess.'

'Then you know that she is a born matchmaker?'

'Indeed I do! Why, it was she who introduced Rudolph to me. The dear old soul!' answered Mrs. Vernon.

'Well,' said Uncle Larry, 'then you will not be surprised to be told that she seized on Ralph De Witt as soon as he arrived, and insisted on introducing him to the most beautiful girl in Mount Desert.'

'What was her name?' asked Mrs. Vernon, innocently.

'Her name was Sibylla.'

'Sibylla? That does not help me out. *I* never heard of a Sibylla. Did you?' asked Mrs. Vernon, turning to Dr. Cheever.

'I have met a lady of that name—quite recently,' answered the doctor, and there seemed to be a certain significance in his tone.

'What was she like?' queried the poet.

'I'm not a good hand at an inventory of a woman's charms, but I'll do it as well as I can. She was a blonde with dark eyes. Her face was absolutely perfect in its Greek purity and regularity. Her neck and arms were worthy of the hand of Phidias or Praxiteles; and, magnificent as she seemed, she had a certain marble statuesqueness which makes the allusion even more exact than it is complimentary. In fact, she was not a woman one could compliment on her looks, for her beauty was of so high an order that all praise seemed inadequate and paltry. I heard Mat Hitchcock once say that she walked like a goddess and danced like an angel.'

'And where did this paragon of perfection come from?' asked Mrs. Vernon unenthusiastically.

'From a little town in the interior of New York. Her parents were poor, and they had stinted themselves to send her to a fashionable school in New York. Then she had rich relatives, and it was a wealthy aunt who had taken her to Mount Desert.'

'And your friend Ralph De Witt was the Pygmalion who sought to warm this cold beauty into life?' This was the question of the poet.

'Yes,' answered Uncle Larry; 'he fell in love with her the instant he laid eyes on her, and to him love was no plaything or pastime; it was a passion to endure till death. After three brief weeks of delight in her presence, Ralph had to go back to his post. He left a throng of other admirers around her, and he had had no chance to tell her of his love. To her their slight intimacy was nothing more than a summer flirtation; to him it was a matter of life and death. He returned to his work, thinking that she did not care for him, and he toiled hard to see if he could not forget, or at least forego her. But it was no use. At Christmas he gave it up, and ran over to New York to see her. She was away in the country, but she came back the last day of the year, and he went to wish her a happy New Year. Cupid sometimes pays a New-Year's call, although calling has gone out of fashion in New York; and Ralph De Witt came to me after he left her, with a glow in his face and a look in his eyes which told me he had hope. How handsome he was as he stood in my study, with his back to the fire, telling me the desire of his heart! What a fine, manly fellow he was! Perhaps she had seen this; perhaps she had caught from him the contagion of emotion; perhaps she had really recognised and respected the depth and the nobility of his nature, and the strength of his passion. The next day he saw her again for a few minutes only, but they were enough for him to ask her to be his wife, and

for her to accept him as her future husband. They agreed that the engagement should not be announced, for he would not be with her again for months, and as an engaged girl she would not have so good a time.'

'Well!' interrupted Mrs. Vernon, 'she was frank, at all events.'

'She jilted him, I suppose?' asked Rudolph Vernon.

'She married him,' answered Uncle Larry, calmly.

Dr. Cheever looked up with a glance of surprise and said: 'She married him? Sibylla married Ralph? Are you sure?'

'I am quite sure.'

'I did not know that,' replied the doctor, resuming his attitude of silent attention.

'I didn't know you knew anything at all about it,' said the doctor's sister. 'At least you never told me anything.'

Dr. Cheever smiled gravely and said nothing. Uncle Larry continued:

'Early in the spring Ralph De Witt received an appointment he had long wished. He was detailed to take charge of a special survey of the cañons of the Colorado River, a task which would take him several summers, while his winters would be employed in working up the observations made during the warm weather. He wrote to me that the Department would allow him to do this winter work either in Washington or at Newport.'

'I think Newport is just as pleasant in winter as it is in summer,' said Mrs. Vernon.

'Ralph thought so too,' answered Laurence Laughton, 'and he knew that Sibylla was fond of Newport—as she was of everything rich and fashionable. Late in the spring he came to New York. He had ten days to make ready for his long summer in the midst of the marvels of the West. He came here with a fixed idea—to get her to marry him before he went away to his work. You see, he loved her so much that his heart sank at the fear of losing her. He trusted her, but he wanted to make sure. All he wished was to have her bound to him firmly. How he got her consent I cannot imagine, but I suppose the hot fire of his manly love must have thawed her icy heart. He succeeded somehow or other, and the morning of his last day in New York he came to me and told me that she had promised to slip out with him that afternoon to old Dr. Van Zandt's to be married quietly at the rectory. No one was to know of this. It was, in fact, to be only a legal confirmation or ratification of their engagement. The wedding, to which all the world would be invited, was fixed for the following December.'

'And so they were married privately?' asked Mrs. Vernon.

'Yes. I was standing on my doorstep, basking in the pleasant sunshine of a beautiful afternoon in May, as Ralph De Witt came up the steps,

as radiantly happy as ever man was. "Uncle Larry," said he, as he wrung my hand with a grip of steel, "I have been married nearly half an hour." "Where's the bride?" I asked. "She has gone home to dress for a swell dinner to-night. I've said good-bye to her. I sha'n't see her again for nearly six months. But I do not mind the parting now, for she is mine—mine by the law and the gospel. Uncle Larry, come to Delmonico's and dine with me; I'll treat. Let's have a wedding feast." We had our dinner, and I let him talk about her through the long spring evening, as we walked up and down Fifth Avenue. He poured out his heart to me. There never was a man so happy or so miserable. He had married her, but he had to leave her almost at the steps of the altar. The parting was painful, but he was full of hope and heart, and he trusted her. To hear him talk about her would have made you think that there was only one woman in the whole wide world, and that there never had been her equal. Romeo was not more rhapsodic, nor was Juliet more beautiful than she, though the fair maid of Verona had the advantage of a warm heart, which Sibylla lacked. He told me his dreams and his plans. He had a share in a mine in Colorado, and he was perfecting a new process for reducing ore, a patent for which he expected in a few days. These were in the future. For the present he had his pay and allowances and the income of the little property his mother had left, and these together were enough for them to live on.

He had had an unexpected legacy from an uncle, and of this he had said nothing to Sibylla, for he wished to surprise her with the tiny little cottage he meant to buy her in the outskirts of Newport. There they would live together and be happy in the winter; while in the summer, while he was away at his field-work, she was to invite her mother and her sister to bear her company. Now I knew her mother, and I knew she had no heart, but only a hard ambition in the place where the heart ought to be. I thought the less Sibylla had to do with her mother, the better for Ralph's chance of happiness. But I said nothing. I never had hinted a doubt of the girl, and, in fact, all my doubts had been killed by the wedding. I never even told him he had better make the best showing he could before her. And I have often wondered whether the end would have been different if he had told her of the house at Newport. But I said nothing; I let him talk, and he talked of her, and of her only, until at last I lost sight of him as he stood on the platform of the sleeping-car of the Pacific express. I watched the train out of the station, and I have never seen Ralph De Witt again from that day to this—at least, I think not.'

At this last remark, added in a lower tone, Dr. Cheever shot a quick glance of interest at the speaker. He took his cigar from his mouth as though he was about to say something, but apparently he thought better of it, and he returned the cigar to his lips silently.

It was Rudolph Vernon who spoke: 'I can't say that I see anything tragic in your story yet, or even any elements of a possible tragedy. But go on—say your say out. I will reserve criticism until you have told the tale.'

'Yes, go on, Uncle Larry. What happened?' asked Mrs. Vernon.

'For several months nothing happened. I had a letter now and again from Ralph, who was working hard by day and dreaming dreams by night. Private business kept me from spending the summer in Europe. Perhaps it was just as well I was at home, for early in July old Dr. Van Zandt had a stroke and he never left his bed again. When he died, toward the end of August, there was much to be done to get the affairs of the church in order, and most of this work was put on my shoulders as senior warden. I had been down to the Safe Deposit Vaults one hot day, about the first of September, and I bought the first edition of the "Gotham Gazette" to read on my way up-town in the elevated. The first telegram which caught my eye announced the death of Ralph De Witt!'

'Poor fellow!' was Mrs. Vernon's involuntary comment.

'Was it an accident?' asked her brother.

Uncle Larry hesitated a second, and then answered: 'All that the telegram told me was the barren fact of his death. It seems he had insisted on scaling the precipitous side of a cañon; before

he had ascended more than a few feet he slipped, and fell head first into the rushing river below, and in a second the current bore him beyond all reach of help. At first I was stunned by the shock. I could not believe that the brave boy I had known since he was a baby had had the life dashed out of him by the cruel waters of the Colorado. Then I suddenly thought of his wife. No one knew of their marriage, or even of their engagement, except me—and I doubted if she were aware of my knowledge. I knew her very slightly ; I had felt the charm of her beauty, but I had always chilled as she came near me. I questioned if it were not my duty to break the news to her gently before the cold brutality of a newspaper paragraph told her of her husband's lonely death. The evening paper would not reach her until the next morning, and if I took the three o'clock train I could be in Newport in time to meet her that night. She was staying at the Sargents', and there was to be a ball that very evening. I was always very fond of Sam Sargent's daughter Dorothy—Mrs. Bob White, you know—and she had sent me an invitation. I had accepted, although I had been moved afterward to give up the idea of going. With the "Gotham Gazette" in my hand I made up my mind that it was my duty to go to Newport and to break the news of Ralph De Witt's death as best I could to his unsuspecting wife.'

Laurence Laughton paused in the telling of his tale, and threw his little cigar through the open

window. He leaned over the table and poured out a tiny glass of brandy. Then he continued:

'Before eleven o'clock that night I was in Newport and at Mr. Sargent's. I asked for Sibylla, and I was told she was in the ball-room. As Sargent's house was not large, he had floored over his lawn, and the ball-room was a tent, hung with flowers, and lighted by the electric light hidden behind Japanese umbrellas. As I entered the tent I thought of Ralph De Witt lying dead and alone, after a struggle with the angry current of the Colorado, while his wife, for whom he would have given his soul, was dancing the German with a French *attaché*. After many vain attempts I got speech of her at last. She took my arm, and I wondered if she could hear the thumping of my heart. We walked up and down a dim piazza more fit for the confidences of a lover than for the message I bore. But if I was excited, she was as calm as ever. As delicately as I could I broke the fatal news.'

'How did she take it?' asked Mrs. Vernon.

'She took it coolly. I had thought her cold, but I confess that her placidity astonished me. She never lost command over herself. She showed no feeling whatever. She listened to me quietly, and said: "Dear me! what a pity! Such a handsome fellow too! and so promising! You were old friends, were you not? It must be a sad blow to you." This reception fairly staggered me. Plainly enough she never suspected

that I knew of her engagement and of her marriage. The careless way in which she brushed aside my news and offered her condolence to me was the last thing I had expected. If it was self-control, it was marvellous; if it was acting there was never better here on the boards of the Comédie Française; if it was hardness of heart, then it was well for Ralph De Witt that his body lay lifeless on the bank of the Colorado. Just then Sam Sargent came out and joined us. I said nothing, but Sibylla began at once, and told him of Ralph's death. Sargent is a good-hearted fellow, coarse at bottom, it may be, but he can be sympathetic. He knew I loved Ralph, and he asked me for the details of his death with kindness in his voice. She listened, impassive and stately, as I told Sargent the little I knew. I watched her, but she never even changed colour. When I had ended, she said, "I liked Mr. De Witt very much. I used to see a good deal of him at Mount Desert last summer—we went rocking together." Then she took Sargent's arm and went into the house, leaving me speechless. Her indifference was appalling, and I did not know what to think.'

'A very remarkable young woman, I must say,' declared Rudolph Vernon.

'That's just like a man,' said Mrs. Vernon, indignantly. 'Do you suppose she wanted to reveal the secrets of her heart to a stranger? Of course she did not. She kept calm before you and the rest of you men, but when she was alone

she dropped the mask of composure and cried all night.'

'I might have given her the benefit of the doubt for a little while, at all events, if——'

'If what?' insisted Mrs. Vernon, with a true woman's instinct of sex defence.

'If I had not met Miss Dorothy Sargent, who came to me in great distress. "Oh, Uncle Larry," she said, "what am I to do? Papa is going to marry again, and he's old enough to be her father too, for she was at school with me, and I was a class ahead of her, and she wasn't clever either. I've no use for a step-mother younger than I am myself, have I? And don't you think he's big enough to know better?" I was in no mood to talk of marrying and of giving in marriage, but I did ask her whom it was her father proposed to marry.'

'It wasn't that Sibylla, was it?' asked Mrs. Vernon.

'It was.'

'But she had refused him?'

'She had accepted him.'

'But she was a married woman!'

'No one knew that. And at any rate she had accepted Sam Sargent. Now you know what manner of man Sam Sargent is. He is a Wall Street speculator, a man of a coarse nature, covered with a layer of refinement, a man of exceeding shrewdness, a man who worshipped success however attained. He's here in Paris now; he was in a box opposite us at the Opéra last

night. Think of a woman's putting aside Ralph De Witt to take Sam Sargent! She had found out that she wanted wealth and the luxury it gives, and she turned from Ralph to Sargent. She had no strength of character—worse yet, no heart. She was as weak as water, and as treacherous.'

'You don't mean to tell me that that woman actually contemplated bigamy?' demanded Vernon.

'Well, I don't know what else to call it,' answered Uncle Larry; 'but she did not look on it that way. She thought that her marriage to Ralph was an idle form, known only to the clergyman and to themselves. Dr. Van Zandt was dead She knew Ralph would not claim her against her will, and she believed that if she destroyed her marriage certificate—the only tangible evidence of her wedding—that she could undo the past and be a free woman.'

'That's feminine logic with a vengeance,' said Rudolph Vernon.

'But if the certificate was destroyed why shouldn't she remarry?' asked Mrs. Vernon, innocently.

'When I got back to New York two days later,' pursued Laughton, 'I found on my desk a letter from Ralph De Witt. I was reading it over again last night, after we returned from the Opéra. I will read it to you, if you like.'

'Yes, do, Uncle Larry,' begged Mrs. Vernon.

Uncle Larry took the letter from his pocket,

and read it as well as he could, for his voice trembled, and more than once he almost broke down.

'In Camp on the Colorado:
'August 30, 1882.

'DEAR UNCLE LARRY,—I got back to the camp last night, after a little *paseo* up in the hills for three weeks, and I found your welcome letter awaiting me. I was pretty tired, for we had been in the saddle thirty-four hours on a stretch, but I read it through before I took off my coat. I had hoped for a letter from Some One Else, but I was disappointed; there must be a breakdown in the mail route somewhere. So I read over again the paragraph in your letter referring to her; and then I tumbled into bed and slept eighteen hours on end. It was nearly noon the next day when I awoke, refreshed and a new man. In truth, I am a new man, improved and made over by the patent process of Cupid and Co. I wake up every morning thanking God for my youth and my strength, and, above all, for the joy of my life. I am as happy as any man ever was. My work is a delight to me, and my future is a dream of bliss. It is no wonder that I build castles in the air; but I remember what Thoreau says, and I am trying to put solid foundations under them. The mine is doing splendidly; it is a boom and not a blizzard this year: and with experience and improved machinery we hope for even better luck next season. And I have finer news yet. You are my

oldest friend, Uncle Larry, and my best friend—except one, and I know you are not jealous of her—and so I will tell you first. The patent has been granted for my new process for reducing ores. And what is more, a practical man from Leadville, a regular mining sharp, who saw the working drawings at my patent agent's, has written to offer me fifty thousand dollars for a quarter interest. Fifty thousand dollars! Think of that, old man! I am a capitalist, a bloated bondholder, and she shall marry a rich man after all. We'll make a raid on Tiffany's when I arrive in New York in the fall, and you shall help me pick out a pair of solitaires—real solitaires, as the lady said—which will give her ears a chance to rival her eyes in their sparkle.

'Good-bye, Uncle Larry, and for ever. When you read this I shall be dead and out of her way. What use is life to me if she does not love me? Her letter has come at last, and I know the worst. She dreads poverty, she breaks with me, and I fear she is going to marry another man. This is a damned bad world, isn't it, Uncle Larry? But I forgive her; I cannot help it, for I love her as much as ever. Poor girl, how she must have suffered before she wrote me that letter! If she wants money she shall have it—she shall have all I hoped to gain. I have no use for it but to make her happy. There's a man in our party here who was a lawyer once, and he is drawing up my will for me. I have made you my executor. You will do

this last favour for me, won't you? I leave everything to her, the little money I have in bank, my share in the mine, my three-quarters of the patent—for I have just written to accept the fifty thousand dollars for the quarter. I'd like her to have some money to go on with. You will attend to all these things for me; you have done so much for me already that I feel I have a right to make this last request. This is a long letter, but I want you to have my last words—my last dying speech and confession. Don't think I am going to be hanged; a man who is born to be drowned can never be hanged; and I am going to be drowned to-morrow. I don't know how or when, but a fall from the rocks is an easy thing to accomplish, and the river will do the rest. If she wishes to marry, I had best take myself out of the way and leave her free. After all, what does it matter? Life is little or nothing—it is only a prologue, or the posy of a ring. It is brief, my lord—as woman's love. I am in haste to be about my business and to put an end to it. The prologue has lasted too long; it is time for the real play to begin, the tragedy of time and eternity, to last until 'the curtain, a funeral pall, comes down with the rush of a storm.' Poor Poe was right for once, though I need no angels to affirm "that the play is the tragedy, Man, and its hero the conqueror, Worm." We shall meet again, Uncle Larry, and until that meeting, God be with you, and God help me!

'RALPH DE WITT.'

'Did she take the legacy?' asked Rudolph Vernon.

'She did indeed,' answered Laughton. 'And Sam Sargent organised a company for working the patent, and floated it in London, and cleared half a million or more out of it. And it was lucky he did, because he got squeezed badly in the Trans-continental Telegraph corner last year, and Ralph De Witt's legacy is all the Sargents have left now.'

'So she actually married Sargent?' was Mrs. Vernon's doleful remark.

'Why not?' asked Laughton, in return. 'Ralph's death left her free to marry whom she pleased.'

'Now you have told your tale, you have proved my assertion,' said Rudolph Vernon. 'In real life the story is incomplete. There is something lacking.'

'She will be punished somehow, never fear,' was Mrs. Vernon's cheerful assertion.

'I think the punishment has begun already,' said Laughton. 'Indeed, it followed fast upon the wrong-doing. At first I fear that Ralph's death was almost a relief to her, for it gave her the freedom she wanted. But no sooner was she married than she began to tremble at her work. With all her money she could not bribe her own thoughts to let her alone. She could not stab her own conscience, and kill it with a single blow. If a conscience must be murdered, it takes a long course of slow poisoning to do it. Then one day there

came a reaction, and she suddenly changed her mind, and refused to believe that Ralph was dead. She thinks that he is alive and near her. She imagines that he watches her, and sends messages to her by one friend and another. She fancies at times that he hovers about her, an impalpable presence. Then, again, he becomes a tangible entity, a living person, and she declares that she has seen him standing before her, with his eyes fixed on her eyes, as though seeking to read the secret of her soul.'

'That's what the doctor here would call a curious hallucination,' said Mr. Vernon.

'Well, I don't know,' answered Uncle Larry, doubtfully.

'Why, the man's *dead*, isn't he?' asked Mrs. Vernon with interest.

'As I said before,' responded Uncle Larry, 'I don't know.'

'But what do you think?'

'Well, I don't know what to think,' answered Mr. Laughton. 'Of course I thought he was dead. Yet his body was never found, though the surveying party searched for it for ten days or more. When I heard how Mrs. Sargent felt and what she fancied, I wondered and I doubted. Now I almost think I have seen him once, or rather twice.'

'When?'

'Last night.'

'Where?'

'Here—in Paris—at the Opéra. Once as we

entered, and then, again, after the third act. The first time was in the lobby ; we stood face to face. If the man who confronted me then was not Ralph De Witt, he was strangely like him. I had a queer, uncanny shiver, but the man looked me in the eye, and did not know me, and passed on, and I lost sight of him.'

'And the second time?' asked Dr. Cheever, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation, although he had listened most attentively.

'As the curtain fell on the third act, I looked at Mrs. Sargent, who sat by the side of her husband in a box to the right of us. I saw in her eyes a look of horror or of fear. I turned my head, and there, on the opposite side of the theatre, stood the same man, Ralph De Witt, or his double. He was gazing intently at Mrs. Sargent. I looked at her again, and I saw her whiten and fall sideways. Her husband caught her in his arms, and they left the box at once. When I sought my dead friend again he was gone.'

There was silence after Laughton stopped speaking. Then Rudolph Vernon remarked: 'The romance of real life is better rounded than I had thought, but it is still incomplete artistically. There is more behind these facts, and to evolve this unsubstantial but essential something is the duty of the literary artist.'

'Perhaps,' said Dr. Cheever, slowly—'perhaps a physician may complete the tale as well as an author.'

'Why, Richard, what do you know about it?' asked his sister.

'Very little indeed, and until this morning I knew even less. If I had heard Mr. Laughton's story yesterday, I could have decided more promptly and more intelligently, it may be, but my decision would have been the same.'

'Were you called in to attend Mrs. Sargent this morning?' asked his sister. 'Oh, why didn't you tell us before?'

'I should not tell you now if the case were not hopeless. I could not go to the Salon with you this morning because I was suddenly summoned to join two French physicians in an examination of Mrs. Sargent's mental condition. There could be no doubt about it, unfortunately; we all agreed; and an hour before I joined you here I signed the order which committed her to an asylum.'

PERCHANCE TO DREAM

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I.

MRS. MARTIN, who was known to her lively young friends in New York as the Duchess of Washington Square, had a handsome place on the Hudson, just above West Point. It was called the Eyrie—although, as Dear Jones naturally remarked, that road did not take you there. Every fall, when the banks of the river reddened to their ripest glory, and when the maple had donned its coat of many colours, the Duchess was wont to fill the Eyrie with her young friends. From the Eyrie was heard the report of many an engagement which had hung fire at Newport and at Lenox. The Duchess was fond of having pretty girls about her, and she always invited clever young men to amuse them. She was an admirable hostess, and no one ever regretted that he had accepted her invitation. Mr. Martin, who was, of course, relegated to his proper position as merely the husband of the Duchess, was, in fact, a charming old gentleman, as the clever young men soon discovered when they came to know him. Indeed, although Mrs.

Martin was the dominant partner, Mr. Martin was quite as popular as she.

On the afternoon of the last Saturday in October, just as the sudden twilight was closing in on the river, the ferry-boat came gently to its place in the dock of the West Shore Station in Jersey City, and two young men in the thick of the throng which pressed forward to the train were thrust sharply against each other.

'Hello, Charley!' said one of them, recognising his involuntary assailant: 'are you devoting yourself to the popular suburban amusement known as "catching your train"?'

'Hello yourself! I'm not a telephone,' Charley Sutton responded, merrily. 'I'm catching a train to-night because I'm going up to the Eyrie to spend Sunday.'

'So am I,' answered his friend, Mr. Robert White, who was one of the editors of the 'Gotham Gazette,' and who wrote admirably about all aquatic sports under the alluring pen-name of 'Poor Bob White.'

'My wife is up there now,' continued Sutton.

'So is mine,' responded White; 'and Dear Jones and his wife promised to go up on this train.'

By this time the young men were alongside the train: they boarded the Pullman car, and in one of the forward compartments they found Mr. and Mrs. Delancey Jones and also Mrs. Martin.

The Duchess greeted them very cordially.

'Come and sit down by me, both of you,' she said, with her pleasant imperiousness: 'I want somebody to talk to me. Dear Jones is getting perfectly horrid. He is so taken up with his wife and the baby now that he isn't half as entertaining as he used to be.'

'Why, Mrs. Martin, how can you say so?' interjected Mrs. Delancey Jones. 'I don't monopolise him at all. I scarcely see anything of him now, he is so busy.'

'You ought not to have introduced us to each other if you didn't want us to fall in love and get married,' said Dear Jones.

'I decline all responsibility on that score,' the Duchess declared. 'People call me a match-maker. Now, I'm nothing of the sort. I never interfere with Providence; and you know marriages are made in heaven.'

'You believe, then, that all weddings are ordained by Fate?' asked Charley Sutton.

'Indeed I do,' Mrs. Martin answered.

'Well, it *is* a rather comforting doctrine for us happily-married men to believe that our good luck was predestination and not free-will,' said White.

'I wish this predestination was accompanied by a gift of second-sight,' Dear Jones remarked, 'that we might see into the future and know our elective affinity and not be downcast when she rejects us the first time of asking.'

Oh, you men would be too conceited to live if

we didn't take you down now and then,' said his wife, airily.

'Of course *I* knew you didn't mean it,' he went on.

'The idea!' she cried, indignantly. 'I did mean it! Why, I couldn't bear you then.'

'Still,' White suggested, 'a power to see into the future would simplify courtship, and men would not draw as many blanks in the lottery of matrimony.'

'Second-sight would be a very handy thing to have in the house, anyhow,' Charley Sutton declared. 'A man who had the gift could make a pocketful of rocks in Wall Street.'

'Oh, Delancey,' cried Mrs. Jones, 'wouldn't it be delightful if you could only interpret dreams! You would make your fortune in a month.'

'I'd be sure to predict that the world was coming to an end every time I ate mince-pie,' replied Dear Jones. 'Nobody has had rich visions on prison-fare since Joseph explained his dream to Pharaoh's chief steward.'

'I wonder how the esoteric Buddhists and the psychic-research sharps would explain away that little act of Joseph's,' Charley Sutton remarked, with a fuller admixture than usual of the Californian idiom which he had brought from the home of his boyhood.

'They would call it telepathy, or thought-transference, or mind-reading, or some other of the slang phrases of the adept,' White answered.

'I don't know how much there may be in this Spiritualism,' said the Duchess, in her most impressive manner; 'but, somehow, I do not feel any right to doubt it altogether. They do very strange things at times, I must say.'

Dear Jones caught Charley Sutton's eye, and they both winked in silent glee at this declaration of principles.

'This play that we have been to see this afternoon,' the Duchess continued—'there is something uncanny about it.'

'The last act is simply thrilling,' added Mrs. Jones: 'I felt as if I must scream out.'

'Where did you go?' asked White.

'Mrs. Martin and I came in this morning,' Mrs. Jones answered, 'to do some shopping, of course——'

'Of course,' interjected her husband, sarcastically.

'And to go to the matinée at the Manhattan Theatre, to see that English company in the "Bells,"' she continued.

'It is rather an eerie play,' said Sutton. 'The vision in the last act, where Mathias dreams that he has been mesmerised and must answer the accusing questions in spite of himself, is a very strong bit of acting.'

'I can't say I enjoyed it,' Mrs. Martin declared: 'it was too vivid. And I couldn't help thinking how awkward it would be if a man was able to read our thoughts and force us to tell our secrets.'

'If any man had such a power,' said Dear Jones with imperturbable gravity, 'going out into society would be inconveniently risky.'

'It would indeed!' the Duchess declared. Whereupon Dear Jones and Charley Sutton exchanged a wicked wink.

'I'm not given to the interpretation of signs and wonders,' said Dear Jones, 'and I have not paid any special attention to the inexplicable phenomena of occult philosophy——'

'Very good!' interrupted White: '"inexplicable phenomena of occult philosophy" is very good.'

'Really, I don't think you ought to jest on such a serious subject,' said the Duchess, authoritatively.

'I assure you I meant to be very serious indeed,' Mr. Delancey Jones explained: 'I was going on to inform you that once I was told a dream which actually came to pass.'

'You mean the man on the "Barataria"?' asked his wife, eagerly, and with a feminine disregard of strictly grammatical construction.

'Yes.'

'Why, that is just what I was going to ask you to tell Mrs. Martin. I think it is the most wonderful thing I ever heard. Oh, you must tell! It was only a month or so ago, you know, when we were coming back from London. You tell them the rest, Lance: I get too excited when I think about it.'

'Spin us the yarn, as Bob White would say,' remarked Charley Sutton.

'If you can a tale unfold,' White added, 'just freeze the marrow of our bones!'

'It isn't anything to laugh at, I assure you,' cried Mrs. Jones, pathetically. 'You think that because Lance is funny sometimes he can't be serious; but he can! Just wait, and you shall see!'

'Is this a joke?' asked the Duchess, who was always a little uneasy in the presence of a merry jest.

'It is quite serious, Mrs. Martin, I assure you. There are no mystic influences in it, nor any mesmeric nonsense: it is only the story of an extraordinary case of foresight into the future, to which I can bear witness in person, although I have absolutely no explanation to propose.'

'It is a mystery, then?' asked White.

'Precisely,' answered Jones; 'and, with all your detective skill, Bob, I doubt if you can spy out the heart of it.'

The voice of the conductor was heard crying 'All aboard!' a bell rang, a whistle shrieked, and the train glided smoothly out of the station. The little company in the compartment of the Pullman car settled back comfortably to listen to the story Dear Jones was going to tell.

II.

'YOU know,' Mr. Delancey Jones began, 'that I had to go to Paris this summer to get some de-

corative panels for the parlour of a man whose house I am building. Now, I'm not one of those who think that Paris is short for Paradise, and I wanted to run over and give my order and hurry back. But my wife said she had business in Paris, too——'

'And so I had,' his wife asserted. 'I hadn't a dress fit to be seen in.'

'Consequently,' he continued, disregarding this interruption, 'she went with me ; and she wouldn't go without the baby——'

'I'm not an inhuman wretch, I hope,' declared Mrs. Jones, sharply. 'As if I could leave the child at home! Besides, she needed clothes as much as I did. But there! I won't say another word. When he looks at me like that, I know I've just *got* to hold my tongue for the rest of the day.'

With unruffled placidity Dear Jones continued, 'The man who makes *robes* didn't come to time, the lady who sells *modes* was late, and the conduct of the *lingère* was unconscionable.—I trust,' he asked, turning to his wife, 'that I have applied these technical terms with precision?'

'Oh yes,' she answered ; 'and you know more about them than most men do.'

'The result was,' Dear Jones went on, 'that we had to give up our passage on the "Provence." By great good luck I managed to get fair state-rooms on the "Barataria," which sailed from Liverpool a fortnight or so later. We had two days in London and a night in Liverpool, and then we went on

board the "Barataria," and waked up the next morning in Queenstown, after a night of storm which proved to us that although the ship rolled very little she pitched tremendously. She had a trick of sliding head-first into a wave, and then shivering, and then wagging her tail up and down, in a way which baffles description.'

'You need not attempt to describe it,' said the Duchess, with dignity, raising her handkerchief to her lips.

Dear Jones was magnanimous. 'Well, I won't,' he said. 'I'll leave it to your imagination. We lay off Queenstown all Sunday morning. Early in the afternoon the tender brought us the mails and a few passengers. I leaned over the side of the boat and watched them come up the gangway. One man I couldn't help looking at: there was something very queer about him, and yet I failed to discover what it was. He seemed commonplace enough in manner and in dress; he was of medium size; and at first sight he had no tangible eccentricity. And yet there was an oddity about him, a certain something which seemed to set him apart from the average man. Even now I cannot say exactly wherein this personal peculiarity lay, yet I studied him all the way over, and I found that others had also remarked it. The one thing in which he definitely differed from others was his paleness; he was as white as a ghost with the dyspepsia. He was a man of perhaps fifty; he was clean-shaven; he had very dark hair, so

absurdly glossy that I wondered if it were not a wig; he had sharp black eyes, which were either abnormally restless or else fixed in a preoccupied stare.

'The "Barataria" was crowded, and the ship's company was as mixed as a Broadway car on a Saturday afternoon: there was the regular medley of pilgrims and strangers, republicans and sinners. There was an English official, Sir Kensington Gower, K.C.B., and there was a German antiquary, Herr Julius Feuerwasser, the discoverer of the celebrated Von der Schwindel manuscript. There was a funny little fellow we called the Egyptian, because he was born in Constantinople, of Dutch parents, and had been brought up in China: he had worked in the South African diamond-fields, and he was then a salaried interpreter at a Cuban court. In short, we had on board all sorts and conditions of men, as per passenger-list. We steamed out of Queenstown in the teeth of a stiff gale; and I shall willingly draw a veil over our feelings for the first two days out. We managed to get on deck and to get into our steamer-chairs and to lie there inert until nightfall; and that was the utmost we could do. But Wednesday was bright: the wind had died away to a fair breeze, just brisk enough to keep our furnaces at their best; the waves had gone down; and so our spirits rose. I went to breakfast late and to lunch early. I found that the odd-looking man I had noted when he came aboard at Queenstown was placed opposite

to me, between Herr Julius Feuerwasser and Sir Kensington Gower. They had already become acquainted one with another. During lunch the pale stranger had a fierce discussion with the learned German about the Eleusinian mysteries, and he pushed the Teuton hard, abounding in facts and quotations and revealing himself as a keen master of close logic. Herr Julius lost his temper once as his wary adversary broke through his guard and pinned him with an unfortunate admission; and at dinner we found that the archæologist had applied to the chief steward to change his seat at table. As he was an overbearing person, I didn't regret his departure.'

'I have seen a German grand duke eat peas with his knife!' said the Duchess, as one who produces a fact of the highest sociological importance.

'Apparently the victor in the debate did not remark the absence of his vanquished foe,' Dear Jones continued, 'for he and the K.C.B. soon got into a most interesting discussion of the Rosicrucians. Obviously enough, Sir Kensington Gower was a learned man, of deep reading and a wide experience of life, and he had given special attention to the subject; but the pale man spoke as one having authority—as though he were the sole surviving repository of the Rosicrucian secret. The talk between him and Sir Kensington was amicable and courteous, and it did not degenerate into a mere duel of words like that in which he had

worsted the German. Their conversation was extremely interesting, and I listened intently, having had a chance to slip in a professional allusion when they happened to refer to the connection between Architecture and Masonry. I heard Sir Kensington Gower call the stranger by name—Mr. Blackstone. There seemed to me to be a curious fitness between this name and its wearer: fancifully enough, I saw in the man a certain dignity and a certain prim decision which made the name singularly appropriate. Before dinner was over, the talk turned to lighter topics. As Sir Kensington went below to see after his wife——'

'I remember that *you* didn't come to see after *me!*' interrupted Mrs. Jones, laughing. 'I was left on deck to the tender mercies of the steward. But no matter; I forgive you.'

Her husband went on with his story, regardless of this feminine personality:

'Mr. Blackstone and I left the table together to get our coffee in the smoking-saloon. Our later conversation had been so easy that I ventured to say to him that a name like his could belong by rights only to a lawyer—or to a coal-dealer. The remark was perhaps impertinent, but it was innocent enough; yet a sudden flush flitted across his white face, and he gave me a piercing flash from his unfathomable eyes before he answered, shortly, "Yes, I am a lawyer; and my father owns and works a coal-mine near Newcastle." I did not risk another familiarity. His manner towards me did

not change; he was as polite and as affable as before: I studied him in vain to see what might be the peculiarity I was conscious of but unable to define. We had our coffee, and, encouraged by my dinner, I was emboldened to take the cigar Mr. Blackstone offered me: I have rarely smoked a better. We sat side by side for a few minutes almost in silence, watching the smoke of our cigars as it wreathed upward, forming quaint interrogation-marks in the air and then fading away into nothing. Then the man we called the Egyptian—I knew him, as he had crossed with us in the "City of Constantinople" last year—came over and asked us to take a hand in a little game of poker.'

'He knew the secret wish of your heart, didn't he?' asked Robert White. 'I suggest this as an appropriate epitaph for Dear Jones's tombstone: "He played the game."'

'I think I can give you a simpler one,' said the young Californian,—'just this: "Jones' Bones."'

'I wonder what there is so fascinating to you men in a game like poker,' the Duchess remarked. 'You all love it. Mr. Martin says that it is the only game a business-man can afford to play.'

'Mr. Martin is a man of excellent judgment—as we can see,' said Robert White, bowing politely.

'Mr. Martin is a man of better manners than to interrupt me when I am telling a story of the most recondite psychological interest,' remarked Dear Jones.

'Don't mind them, Lance,' his wife urged: 'just hurry up to the surprising part of the story, and they will be glad enough to listen then.'

Thus encouraged, Dear Jones proceeded:

'As I said, the Egyptian came over and asked us to join in getting up a game. Mr. Blackstone had been playing with them every afternoon and evening. We crossed over to an empty table in the corner where the other players were awaiting us. There was a change in Blackstone's manner as he sat down before the cards. I thought I saw a hotter fire in his eyes. As soon as he took his seat, he reached out his hand and grasped the pack which was lying on the table. For the first time, I noticed how thin and slender and sinewy his hand was. He gripped the cards like a steel-trap, holding them for a second or two face downward on the table. Then he cut hastily and looked at the bottom card. Again the quick flush fled across his face. He cut again and looked at the card, and then again. I noted that he had cut a black court-card three times running. After the last cut he gripped the pack again, as though he wished to try a fourth time, but he seemed to change his mind, for he threw the cards down on the table and said, "I think I had better not play to-night." "Why not?" asked the Egyptian. Blackstone smiled very queerly, and hesitated again, and then he said, "Because I should win your money." The Egyptian laughed. "I take my chance of that," he answered; "you play; you

win—if you can ; I win—if I can." Blackstone smiled again. "You had better not urge me," he replied : "sometimes I can look a little way into the future : I can tell when I am going to be lucky. If I play to-night, I shall win from all of you." The Egyptian laughed again, and then began dealing the cards. "I bet you two shillings," he said to Blackstone, "I get a pot before you." The other players pressed Blackstone to play. Finally he yielded, repeating his warning, "If I play to-night, I shall win everything." Then we began the game.'

'And did he win?' asked Charley Sutton, by his interest confessing his initiation into the freemasonry of poker.

'Well, he did!' Jones answered. 'He emptied my pocket in fifteen minutes. He won on good hands and he won on bad hands. He came in on an ace and got four of a kind. He could fill anything. He could draw a tanyard to a shoestring, —as they say in Kentucky. He had a draught like a chimney on fire. There never was such luck. At last, when he drew a king of spades to make a royal straight flush, the Egyptain surrendered : "I run!" he cried ; "I run like a leetle rabbit!" and he dropped his hands on each side of his head, like the falling ears of a frightened rabbit.'

'Was it a square game?' the young Californian asked, eagerly.

'I do not doubt it,' answered Jones: 'I watched very closely, and I have no reason to think there

was any unfair play. We changed the pack half a dozen times; and it made no matter who dealt, Blackstone held the highest hand.'

'Mr. Blackstone seems to have had a sort of second-sight for his money,' suggested Robert White.

'Did his luck continue?' asked Charley Sutton.

'Generally,' Robert White remarked, judicially, 'luck is like milk: no matter how good it is, if you keep it long enough it is sure to turn.'

'I didn't go into the smoking-saloon the next day,' Dear Jones explained. 'I——'

'I wouldn't let him!' interrupted Mrs. Jones. 'I thought he had lost enough for one trip: so I tried to console him by talking over the lovely things I could have bought in Paris with that money.'

'But on Friday,' her husband continued, 'as we left the lunch-table together, Blackstone said to me, "You did not play yesterday." I told him I had lost all I could afford. "Yesterday the play was dull," he said: "it was anybody's game. But to-day you can have your revenge." I told him I had had enough for one voyage. "But I insist on your playing this afternoon," he persisted: "I am going to lose, and I want you to win your money back; I do not want those other men to win from me what you have lost: it is enough if they get back what I have gained from them." "But how do you know that you will lose and that I shall win?" I asked. He smiled a strange, worn smile,

and answered, "I have my moods, and I can read them. To-day I shall lose. To-day is Friday, you know—hangman's day. Friday is always my unlucky day. I get all my bad news on Friday. A week ago this morning, for example, I had no expectation of being where I am to-day." After saying this, he gave me another of his transfixing looks, as though to mark what effect upon me this confession might have. Then he urged me again to take a hand in the game, and at last I suffered myself to be persuaded. He had prophesied aright, for we all had good luck and he had bad luck. He played well—brilliantly, even; he was not disheartened by his losses; he held good cards; he drew to advantage; but he was beaten unceasingly. If he had a good hand, some one else held a better. If he risked a bluff, he was called with absolute certainty. In less than an hour I had won my money back, and I began to feel ashamed of winning any more. So I was very glad when my wife sent for me to go on deck. But just before dinner I looked into the smoking-saloon for a minute. The five other players sat around the little table in the corner, exactly as I had left them three hours before. When the Egyptian saw me he cried, gleefully, "You made mistake to go away. We all win, all the time. We clean him out soon." I looked at Blackstone. His face was whiter even than before: his eye caught mine, and I saw in it an expression I could not define, but it haunted me all night. As I

turned to go, he rose and said, "I have had enough for to-day. It is no use to struggle with what is written. Perhaps I may have a more fortunate mood to-morrow." At dinner he sat opposite to me, as usual, but there was no change in his manner. He had lost heavily—far more heavily than he could afford, I fancy—but there was no trace of chagrin about him. He talked as easily and as lightly as before ; and by the time dinner was half over, he and Sir Kensington Gower were deep in a discussion of the tenets of the Theosophists. Sir Kensington was a scoffer, and he mocked at their marvels ; but Blackstone maintained that, however absurd their pretensions were, they had gained at least a glimpse of the truth. He said that there were those alive now who could work wonders more mysterious than any wrought by the witch of Endor. I remember that he told Sir Kensington that the secret archives of Paris recorded certain sharp doings of Cagliostro which passed all explanation.'

'If he knew so much,' asked Charley Sutton, 'why didn't he know enough not to buck against his bad luck ?'

'I can understand that,' Robert White remarked : 'he was like many another man—he did not *believe* what he *knew*.'

'Tell them about the dream, Lance,' said Mrs. Jones.

'I'm coming to that now,' answered her husband. 'I have not yet told you that, in spite of

our bad weather the first two days out, we had made a splendid run—almost the best on record. By Friday evening it was evident that, unless there were an accident of some sort, we should get inside of Sandy Hook some time on Saturday night—probably a little before midnight. So on Saturday morning we all got up with a sense of relief at our early delivery from our floating gaol. You have heard of the saying that going to sea is as bad as going to prison, with the added chance of drowning?'

'I have heard the saying,' answered Bob White, indignantly—for he was always quick to praise a seafaring life—'and I think that the man who said it was not born to be drowned.'

'I believe you are web-footed,' returned Dear Jones: 'most of us are not; and we were delighted to get within hail of the coast. It was a lovely day, and the sea was as smooth as I ever saw it. We made a run of four hundred and sixty-eight miles at noon; we took our pilot one hour later; we sent up our rocket and burned our Roman candles off Fire Island about nine that evening; and we ran inside Sandy Hook a little after eleven. Shortly before we had crossed the bar, and as the lights of the coast were beginning to get more and more distinct, Mr. Blackstone joined me, while I was standing near the captain's room. The light from the electric lamps on the stairs fell on his head, and I marked the same uncanny smile which had played about his face when he rose from the

card-table after losing his money the day before. We walked the length of the ship two or three times, exchanging commonplaces about America. I found that he had never been out of England before; but he had improved his time on the boat, for he had already mastered the topography of Manhattan Island and of New York Bay. He asked me how close we should come to the shore when we entered the Hook, and whether we should anchor at Quarantine in mid-stream or alongside a dock. When I had answered his questions as best I could, he was silent for a little space. Then, suddenly, as we came to the end of the ship, he stopped, and asked me if I were superstitious. I laughed, and answered that I was like the man who did not believe in ghosts but was afraid of them. "I thought so," he returned. "I thought you were not one of the narrow and self-satisfied souls who believe only what they can prove, and who cannot imagine circumstances under which two and two may not make four. Now, I am superstitious—if a belief in omens, dreams, and other manifestations of the unseen can fairly be called a superstition. I cannot help lending credence to these things, for every event of my life has taught me to rely on the warnings and the promises I receive from the unknown. I do not always understand the message; but if I disobey it when I do comprehend, I am sorely punished. I had a dream last night which I cannot interpret. Perhaps you may help me." I confess that I was impressed

by his earnestness; and, not without a share of curiosity, I told him I should be glad to listen. He transfixed me with another rapid glance, and then he said, "This was my dream. I dreamed that it was to-morrow morning,—Sunday morning,—and that I was in New York. I was reading a newspaper: there is a paper in New York called the 'Gotham Gazette'?" I told him that there was such a journal. "Is it published on Sunday?" he asked. I explained that it sold more copies on Sunday than on any other day of the week.'

'One hundred and thirty-seven thousand last Sunday,' interrupted Robert White, smiling, 'according to the sworn statement of the foreman of the press-room: advertisers will do well, et cetera, et cetera.'

'For particulars, see small bills,' added Charley Sutton.

Dear Jones paid no attention to these unnecessary remarks.

'Blackstone repeated,' he continued, 'that he dreamt he was in New York on Sunday morning reading the "Gotham Gazette;" and he told me he had been trying all day to remember exactly what it was he had read in it, but his recollections were vague, and he could recall with precision only four passages from the paper. "You know," he said to me, "how old and solid the house of Blough Brothers and Company is?" I answered that I knew that they were as safe a bank as could be found in Lombard Street. "The first thing I read in the

'Gotham Gazette' of to-morrow," he said, "was a message from London announcing that Blough Brothers and Company had failed the day before—that is, to-day, Saturday." I laughed easily, and told him that he ought not to give a second thought to a dream as wild as his, for I supposed that Blough Brothers and Company were as safe as the Bank of England. He shot another sharp glance through me, and answered, after a second's hesitation, that stranger things had happened than the failure of Blough Brothers and Company. Then he went on to tell me the second of the things he was able to recall from his vague memory of the "Gotham Gazette" of Sunday morning. You remember the great steam-yacht race—the international match between Joshua Hoffman's "Rhadamanthus" and the English boat the "Skyrocket"? Well, that race was to come off that very Saturday: it had been decided probably only five or six hours before our talk. Blackstone told me that he had read a full account of it in the "Gotham Gazette" of the next day, and that it had been an even race, but that from the start the American yacht had led a little, and that the English boat had been beaten by less than ten minutes. The third thing he had read in the paper was a review of a book. "I think I have heard you refer to Mr. Rudolph Vernon, the poet, as a friend of yours?" he asked. I said I knew Vernon, and that I expected to read his new poem as soon as it was published. "It is called 'An Epic of Ghosts,' and there was a long

criticism of it in the 'Gotham Gazette,'" said Blackstone—"a criticism which began by calling it one of the most peculiar of poems and by declaring that its effect on the reader was ghastly rather than ghostly."'

'And he told you this the night before you arrived?' asked Robert White, very much interested. 'Why——'

'Let me tell my tale,' answered Dear Jones: 'you can cross-question me afterwards. I shall not be long now.'

'And what was the fourth item he remembered?' the Duchess inquired.

'The fourth item,' Dear Jones responded, 'was a paragraph announcing the arrival in New York of the steamship "Barataria"—the boat in the stern of which we were then standing—and noting that one of the passengers was mysteriously missing, having apparently committed suicide by jumping overboard the night before. With involuntary haste I asked him the name of this passenger. "It was not given in the newspaper," he answered, "or, if it was, I cannot recall it." We stood for a moment silently side by side, gazing at the phosphorescent wake of the ship. The second officer, Mr. Macdonough, came aft just then, and I walked back with him to return a book I had borrowed. I found my wife had gone to bed; and in a few minutes I was asleep, having given little heed to Blackstone's dream, vividly as he had recited its unusual circumstances. The next morning we

were busied with the wearying preliminaries of disembarking, and I did not notice the absence of Blackstone from the breakfast table. When we had been warped into dock and had signed our papers before the custom-house officials, we left the boat and went down on the wharf to wait for our trunks, seven of which were at the very bottom of the hold. A newsboy offered me the Sunday papers, and I bought the "Gotham Gazette." The first words that met my eye were the headlines of a cable message: "Heavy Failure in London—Sudden Stoppage of Blough Brothers and Company." The next thing I saw was an account of the great steam-yacht race. As you know, the "Rhadamanthus" had beaten the "Skyrocket" by eight minutes. I could not but recall Blackstone's dream, and I instantly tore the newspaper open, that I might see if there were a review of Rudolph Vernon's "Epic of Ghosts;" and there it was. The criticism began by calling it the most peculiar of poems and by saying that its effect was ghastly rather than ghostly. Then I searched for the fourth item of the dream. But I could not find it. That one alone of the four things he had told me was not in the paper. There was nothing about the "Barataria" but the formal announcement of our arrival in the column of shipping news. Although the fourth item was not to be found, the presence of the other three was startling enough, it seemed to me, and I thought that Blackstone would be interested to see the real "Gotham

Gazette" of Sunday morning, that he might compare it with the "Gotham Gazette" he had read in his dream. I looked about on the dock, but he was not visible. I went back on the boat, but I could not lay eyes on him. I asked our table-steward and others, but no one had seen him. At last I went to Mr. Macdonough, the second officer, to inquire his whereabouts. Before I had more than mentioned Blackstone's name, Mr. Macdonough became very serious. "I cannot tell you where Mr. Blackstone is, for I do not know," he said: "in fact, nobody knows. He is missing. It is quite a mystery what has become of him. He has not been seen since we left him last night —you and I. So far as I can judge, we were the last to speak to him or to see him. All trace of him is lost since we walked forward last night, leaving him standing in the stern of the ship. He did not sleep in his state-room, so his steward says. We do not wish to think that he has jumped overboard, but I must confess it looks like it. Did he ever say anything to you which makes you think he might commit suicide?" I answered that I could recall nothing pointing towards self-destruction. "He was a queer man," said Mr. Macdonough, "a very queer man, and I fear we shall never see him again." And, so far as I know, nobody has ever seen him again.'

As Dear Jones came to the end of his story, the rattling train plunged into a long tunnel.

III.

WHEN the train at last shook itself out of the tunnel, Robert White was the first to break the silence.

'To sum up,' he said to Dear Jones, 'this man who called himself Blackstone told you on Saturday evening four things which he had dreamt would be in the "Gotham Gazette" of Sunday morning. Three of these things were in the "Gotham Gazette" and, while the fourth item was absent from the newspaper, the suicide it recorded had apparently taken place?'

'Yes,' answered Dear Jones.

'How do you account for this extraordinary manifestation of the power of second-sight operating during sleep?' White asked.

Dear Jones replied, shortly:

'Oh, I do not account for it.'

'What have you to suggest?' White inquired.

'I haven't anything to suggest,' Dear Jones answered. 'I have given you the facts as I know them. Every man is free to interpret them to please himself. I tell the tale only: I have not hinted at any explanation, either natural or supernatural.'

'Perhaps Mr. White can unravel the mystery,' said Mrs. Jones, with just a tinge of acerbity in her manner.

'No,' White returned, thus attacked in the

flank—'no, I have no explanation to offer—at least, not until I have fuller information.'

'I have emptied myself of the facts in the case,' retorted Dear Jones, 'and a cider-press couldn't get any more details out of me.'

With an amiable desire to pour oil on waters which might be troubled, the Duchess remarked, pleasantly, 'I think Dear Jones has told us a most interesting story, and I'm sure we ought to be obliged to him.'

Dear Jones arose and bowed his thanks. Just then the train went sharply around a curve, and Dear Jones resumed his seat in the car with awkward promptness. As he sat down, Robert White looked up at him musingly. At length he spoke:

'You say the man called himself Blackstone?'

'Yes.'

'He was a peculiar-looking man, you say,' Robert White continued, 'and yet you could not declare wherein his oddity lay. He was of medium size, a little under the average height, and a little inclined to be stout. He was about fifty years old. He wore a black wig. He had a very white face. His dark eyes were restless when they were not fixed in a vague stare——'

'Why,' cried Dear Jones, 'how did you know that?'

'He had a long, full beard,' Robert White went on; when Dear Jones broke in again:

'Oh, no: he was clean-shaven.'

'Ah!' said Robert White, 'perhaps he had

removed his beard to change his appearance. Did he have the blue chin one sees in a man whose face is naturally hairy?'

'He had,' answered Dear Jones; 'and the deadly pallor of his cheeks made this azure of his jaw more obvious.'

'I am inclined to think,' Robert White said, slowly—'I am inclined to think that the man who told you his alleged dream, and who called himself Blackstone, was John Coke, the chief clerk and confidential manager of Blough Brothers and Company——'

'The firm that failed?' the Duchess asked.

'Precisely,' was the answer; 'and he was the cause of the failure—he and Braxton Blough, a younger son of the senior partner. They both absconded on the Saturday before the failure—the Saturday you sailed: Coke could easily have left London with the mail and joined you at Queenstown. I took a great interest in the case, for my father-in-law lost a lot of money he had sent over to be used in operating in the London Stock Exchange.'

'I shouldn't wonder if you were right in your supposition, Bob,' said Charley Sutton; 'and of course if the man had cleaned out Blough Brothers and Company he could make a pretty close guess when they were likely to suspend. Besides, Blackstone is just the sort of slantindicular name a man called Coke would take.'

'Coke?' repeated the Duchess; 'Coke? Isn't

that the name of the Englishman Mr. Hitchcock used to talk to us about in London?'

'Yes,' answered Mrs. Jones; 'I think I have heard Mr. Hitchcock speak of a Mr. Coke.'

'White looked up quickly with a smile. 'Do you mean Mat Hitchcock?'

'Mr. C. Mather Hitchcock is the gentleman I mean,' replied Mrs. Martin.

'Ah!' said White significantly.

'I saw a good deal of him last summer in London, and I heard him speak of a Mr. Coke several times. I think he said he was the manager or director or something of Blough Brothers and Company. I know he told me that Mr. Coke was the best judge of sherry and of poetry in all England. I own I thought the conjunction rather odd.'

'Mrs. Martin,' said Robert White, 'you have given us the explanation of another of the predictions in the alleged Mr. Blackstone's alleged dream. I happen to know that, owing to a set of curious circumstances, little Mat Hitchcock wrote the review of the "Epic of Ghosts" which appeared in the "Gotham Gazette."'

'And you think he showed what he had written to Coke before he sent it off to the paper?' asked Dear Jones.

'Isn't it just like him?' White returned.

Dear Jones smiled, and answered that Mat Hitchcock was both leaky and conceited, and that he probably did show his review to everybody within range.

'But how did this Mr. Blackstone know that the review would appear on that particular Sunday morning?' asked Mrs. Jones, with a slightly aggressive scepticism.

'He didn't *know* it,' answered White; 'he just guessed it; and it was not so very remarkable a guess either, if he knew when the review was posted in London, as the "Gotham Gazette" prints book-notices only on Sundays.'

'Still, it was a most extraordinary dream,' said the Duchess, with dignity, not altogether approving of any attempt to explain away anything purporting to be supernatural.

'The failure of Blough Brothers and Company was remarkable, if you like,' Robert White continued. 'The house was more than a century old; it held the highest position in Lombard Street; it was supposed to be conservative and safe; and yet for the past five years it had been little better than an empty shell. This man Coke was allowed to do pretty much as he pleased; and he and Braxton Blough, the younger son of old Sir Barwood Blough, the head of the house, were as thick as thieves—I use the phrase advisedly.'

'Thank you,' said Mrs. Jones, with a chilly smile.

'They speculated in stocks,' Robert White pursued; 'they loaded themselves up with cats and dogs; they took little fliers in such inflammable material as Turkish and Egyptian bonds; and they went on the turf together. They owned

race-horses together as "Mr. Littleton;" and that's another bit of evidence that your Mr. Blackstone was really this man Coke. You see? Coke—Littleton—Blackstone?'

'I see,' answered Dear Jones.

'When the game was up, there was a warrant out for Coke, but he had been gone for a week. It was supposed he had run over to Paris; but that must have been a mere blind of his, since he came over here on the "Barataria" with you.'

'He came over with me,' said Dear Jones, quietly, 'but he did not land with me.'

'Poor Braxton Blough had been led astray by Coke, who tempted him and got him in his power and kept him under his thumb. When the bubble burst he disappeared too, and it is supposed that he took the Queen's shilling and is now a private at the Cape of Good Hope. He wasn't in England when poor old Sir Barwood Blough died of a broken heart. Braxton had always been his favourite son, and he had spared the rod and spoiled the child.'

'Braxton Blough?' repeated the Duchess. 'Surely I have met a man of that name; and I think it was at the dinner Lord Shandygaff gave us at Greenwich.'

'I remember him now,' broke in Dear Jones—'a dark, gipsy-looking fellow. I know I remarked on the difference between him and Lord Shandygaff, who was the very type of an Irish sportsman, with all that the word implies.'

Robert White whistled.

'Oh, I beg your pardon,' he cried, hastily, as Mrs. Martin looked at him with surprise. 'You will forgive me when I explain. Now we have stumbled on something really extraordinary. You know those odd little Japanese puzzles—just a lot of curiously-shaped bits which you can fit together into a perfect square?'

'I have known them from my youth up,' answered Dear Jones, dryly; 'and I see nothing extraordinary in them.'

'I refer to them only as an illustration,' Robert White returned. 'You tell us a tale of a dream and its fulfilment; you set forth a puzzle, but there are several little bits wanting; the square is not perfect; there is a hole in the centre. Now, as it happens, we here who have heard the tale can complete the square. We can fill the hole in the centre, for we chance to have concealed about our persons the little bits which were missing. And Mrs. Martin has just produced one of them. You met Mr. Braxton Blough at a dinner given by Lord Shandygaff; and it was natural that you should, for the two men had many tastes in common, and I have heard that they were very intimate. Indeed, next to Coke, Lord Shandygaff was Braxton Blough's closest friend. And this provides us with a possible explanation of another of the alleged predictions in the alleged dream of the alleged Blackstone.'

'How so?' asked Charley Sutton.

'I confess I don't see it,' said Dear Jones.

'That's because you do not know the secret history of the steam-yacht race,' Robert White answered. 'Lord Shandygaff is the owner of the "Skyrocket"; he is a betting man; he was in New York for a fortnight before the race came off; and yet he did not back his boat as though he believed she would win. Now, I have been told, and I believe, that when the match had been made and the money put up, a rumour of the speed made by the "Rhadamanthus" in a private trial over a measured mile, after Joshua Hoffman had put in those new boilers, reached the ears of the owner of the "Skyrocket." It is said that Lord Shandygaff then had a private trial of his yacht over a measured mile under similar conditions of wind and weather as that of the "Rhadamanthus," and he discovered, to his disappointment and disgust, that his boat was going to be beaten. I have understood that he came to the conclusion, then and there, that he was going to lose the race and his twenty-five thousand dollars—unless there should be a stiff gale of wind when the match came off, in which case he thought he might have a fair chance of winning.'

'Well?' asked Charley Sutton, as Robert White paused.

'Well,' said White, 'if what I have stated on information and belief is true, if Lord Shandygaff believed that his boat would be beaten, his intimate

friend Braxton Blough would not be kept in the dark ; and whatever light Braxton Blough might have he would share with his intimate friend Coke. Therefore your friend the alleged Blackstone, when he told you his alleged dream on Saturday, the day of the race, knew that there was smooth water and a light breeze only, and that therefore the "Rhadamanthus" had probably beaten the "Skyrocket" from start to finish.'

'I see,' said Charley Sutton, meditatively.

Mrs. Jones looked at Mr. White with not a little dissatisfaction, saying—

'You have tried very hard to explain away this Mr. Blackstone's dream as far as the failure of Blough Brothers and Company is concerned, and the review of Mr. Vernon's book, and the race between the "Rhadamanthus"and the "Skyrocket"; but how do you account for the suicide?'

'How do you know there was any suicide?' asked Robert White, with a slight smile.

'It was in the "Gotham Gazette"—your own paper,' she said, with ill-concealed triumph.

'It was in the "Gotham Gazette" which Coke said he had seen in a vision,' White returned; 'but I do not think it was ever in any "Gotham Gazette" sent out from our office in Park Row.'

'But I thought——' began Mrs. Jones, when her husband interrupted.

'I'm afraid it is no use arguing with White,' he

said : 'he seems to have all the facts at his fingers' ends.'

'Thank you,' White rejoined. 'I wish I had my fingers' ends on Coke's collar.'

'That's just what I wanted to ask you,' said Dear Jones. 'Where is he?'

'How do I know?' returned White.

'What do you think?' Dear Jones asked.

'I don't know what to think,' answered Robert White; 'the facts fail me. Probably the "Barataria" was not very far from shore when she anchored off Quarantine that night, soon after you and Mr. Macdonough left him in the stern of the ship?'

'We were within pistol-shot of the health officer's dock, I suppose,' replied Dear Jones.

'Then,' said Robert White, 'perhaps Coke jumped overboard and swam ashore, and so killed the trail by taking water. We have an extradition treaty with Great Britain, and he may have told you his dream so that you could bear witness in case he was tracked by the detectives. Perhaps, however, he told you the truth when he told you his dream.'

'I shall always believe that,' Mrs. Jones remarked.

'So shall I,' said Mrs. Martin. 'It is very unpleasant to destroy one's faith in anything. It is so much better to believe all one can : at least that is my opinion.'

This opinion was handed down by the Duchess with an air which implied that no appeal could be taken.

Robert White wisely held his peace.

Then the train slackened before stopping at the station where Mrs. Martin's carriage was awaiting them.

PERTURBED SPIRITS

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I.

WHEN it was announced that Mr. Francis Meredith had been appointed secretary to the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society, the friends of the other candidates for that office were violently indignant, and declared that the appointment was one conspicuously unfit to be made. The friends of Mr. Francis Meredith smiled pleasantly as they protested mildly in his behalf; they said that he would do very well after he mastered the duties of the post, and that the work was not onerous, even for a man wholly unused to any regular occupation; but while they were saying with their tongues that Fanny Meredith was a good fellow, in their hearts they were wondering how a round young man would manage in a square hole. From this it may be inferred that the opponents of the appointment were altogether in the right, and that one fortunate man owed the place to a freak of favouritism.

It may serve to indicate the character of Mr. Francis Meredith to record that to his intimates he was known, not as Frank, but as Fanny. He was

a charming and most ladylike young man, who toiled not neither did he spin. He owed his exemption from labour and his social standing to the fact that he was the only son of his mother, and she a widow of large wealth. He had managed, somehow or other, to creep through college in the course of five years. He was a kindly youth, but heedless, careless, scatterbrained, and fixing his mind with ease only on the one object of his existence—the conducting of a cotillion. To conduct the cotillion decently and in order seemed to Fanny Meredith to be the crowning glory of a young gentleman's career. Unfortunately his mother's trustee made unwise investments and died, leaving his affairs curiously entangled, and it became necessary for Meredith to do something for himself. He scorned a place under Government; besides, he could not pass the examination with any hope of appointment. As it happened, Mrs. Meredith's trustee had been the secretary of the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society, and his death made it possible to work out a sort of poetic justice by giving the post to Fanny Meredith.

It is difficult to speak without awe of that august conclave, the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society. During the original Dutch ownership of Manhattan Island, and before New Amsterdam experienced a change of heart and became New York, certain worthy burghers of the city had combined in a benevolent association which continued its labours even after the English capture of

the colony and through the long struggle of the Revolution. When at last New York was firmly established as the Empire City, no one of its institutions was more deeply rooted or more abundantly flourishing than the Saint Nicholas Relief Society. It was rich, for it had received lands and tenements and hereditaments which had multiplied in value and increased in income with the growth of the city. It did much good. It was admirably managed. It had a delightful aroma of antiquity, denied to most American institutions. It was fashionable. It was exclusive. To be a member of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society was the New York equivalent to the New England ownership of a portrait by Copley—it was a certificate of gentle birth. To be elected to the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society was indisputable evidence that a man's family had been held in honour here in New York for two centuries. Just as the court circles of Austria are closed to any one who cannot show sixteen quarterings, so the unwritten law of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society forbade the election to the council of any one whose ancestors had not settled in Manhattan Island before it surrendered to Colonel Nicolls in 1664.

Among the descendants of the scant fifteen hundred inhabitants of New Amsterdam were not a few shrewd men of business. The affairs of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society were always ably and adroitly managed, and the property of the

society was well administered. Its annual revenues were greatly increased by a yearly ball given just before Lent allowed the ladies of fashion time to repent of their sins. This public ball—for it was public practically, as any man might enter who could pay the high price asked for a ticket—being patronised by the most fashionable ladies of New York, was always crushingly attended, to the replenishment of the coffers of the charity. To this public ball there succeeded, after the interval of Lent, a private dinner of the council, invariably given on the Tuesday in Easter week, the Tuesday after Paas. The Dutch word still lingers, and perhaps the Paas dinner of the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society may have helped to keep it alive and in the mouths of men.

To attend to the annual ball and to the Paas dinner were the chief duties of the secretary of the council; it is possible even to assert that these were his sole duties. He had nothing whatever to do with the management of the society; he was the secretary of the council only; and it was precisely because the obligations of the office were little more than ornamental that the friends of Mr. Francis Meredith maintained his perfect ability to fulfil them satisfactorily. He had been elected at the January meeting of the council, and he was told to exercise a general supervision over the arrangements of the ball, which was to take place just in the middle of February—on Saint Valentine's Day, in fact.

'I wonder how Fanny Meredith will make out,' said Mr. Delancey Jones, when he heard of the appointment. 'Fanny Meredith is a good-looking fellow, and a good fellow too, and the girls all say he dances divinely; but he is more different kinds of a fool than any other man I know!'

As it happened, Fanny Meredith had very little to do with the ball, but he did that little wrong. He blundered in every inconceivable manner and with the most imperturbable good humour. He altered the advertisements, for one thing, just as they were going to the newspapers and without consultation with any one; and the next morning the members of the council were shocked to see that tickets would be for sale at the door until midnight—there having been hitherto a pleasing convention that tickets could be had only by those vouched for by members of the society. Then, at the February meeting of the council, he arose with the smile of a man about to impart wisdom, and suggested that as the clergymen of New York were always willing to lend a helping hand to charity, it would be a very clever device if they were to request the rectors of the fashionable churches to make from the altar formal announcement of the ball, with full particulars as to the price of tickets and the persons from whom these might be purchased. And when the night of the ball arrived at last, and Fanny Meredith was requested to welcome the journalists who came to 'write it up' and to provide for their comfort,

internal and external, he said something to Harry Brackett, who had been sent up from the 'Gotham Gazette' to provide a picturesque description of the ball, to be supplemented by the more personal notes of the 'society reporter.' Just what it was that Fanny Meredith said to Harry Brackett no one has ever been able to ascertain exactly, but, whatever it was, it took the journalist completely by surprise; he looked at the secretary of the council for a minute in dazed astonishment, and then, his sense of humour overcoming his indignation, he said slowly, 'Somebody must have left a door open somewhere, and this thing blew in!'

But the petty errors the new secretary committed at the ball were as nothing to the mighty blunder he made at the Paas dinner of the council The Saint Nicholas Relief Society may have any number of annual subscribers, but it has only two hundred members elected for life. From these two hundred members is chosen a council of twenty-one. Among the members are many ladies, and at least a third of the council are of the sex which wear ear-rings. It is this mingling of sharp men and clever women in the council which gives its strength to the Saint Nicholas Relief Society. In nothing is the skill of the management shown to more advantage than in the choice of members of the council. There are young ladies, there are old bachelors, there are substantial matrons, and there are fathers of families; and they dwell together in

unity, so far, at least, as the Saint Nicholas Relief Society is concerned. A meeting of the council presents a sight at once heterogeneous and characteristic. Possibly it is this variety of persons and of points of view that makes the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society so successful as it has been in its task of administering wealth and of ministering to the needy. Certainly the dissimilarity of character and the unity of object help to make the annual Paas dinner a season of refreshment. Most of the members of the council are busy, but it is very rare indeed for one of them to be absent from his seat or from her seat, as the case may be, at the Paas dinner.

The number of the council is twenty-one, and has always been twenty-one. Fanny Meredith forgot all about the Paas dinner until reminded of it less than a week before Easter. Then he rushed off to the old-fashioned restaurant where the dinner was always given, and he spent four hours there in the ordering of a proper series of courses for twenty-one people. He had seized the nearest annual report of the society, and he gave it to a copyist with a score of blank invitation cards, telling her to send them out to the members of the council, in accordance with a list printed at the end of the report. The copyist did as she was bidden, and the invitations went forth by the post.

But when the members of the council assembled

on the evening of the Tuesday after Easter they were only thirteen in number. They waited nearly an hour for the other eight, and then they sat down ill at ease. While they were yet eating their oysters Mr. Francis Meredith came in to gaze on his handiwork. Mr. Jacob Leisler, jun., asked him if he had sent all the invitations.

'Of course I did,' he answered; 'you don't think I could make a mistake about a little thing like that, do you?'

To this leading question there was no answer; so Meredith continued, taking a report from his pocket:

'I wouldn't trust myself to write them, so I gave this list to a copyist, and I put all the envelopes in the post myself.'

'Let me see that report,' said Mr. Leisler, holding out his hand. Mr. Jacob Leisler, jun., was the chairman of the finance committee, and a man speaking with authority. On the present occasion he was presiding.

The unsuspecting Fanny gave him the pamphlet. Mr. Leisler glanced at it, read the list of the council, turned to the date on the title-page, and then inquired calmly:

'Mr. Meredith, do you know when this report was printed?'

'Last fall, of course,' answered the secretary.

'Just twenty-two years ago last fall,' Mr. Leisler returned; 'so if you have invited to this dinner here to-night the council whose names appear in

this report, you have not asked the eight absent members who are alive, and you have asked eight members who are dead! And that accounts for the empty chairs here.'

Fanny Meredith laughed feebly, and then he laughed again faintly. At last he murmured, 'I seem to have made a mistake.'

As he shrank away towards the door, amid an embarrassed silence, Mr. Leisler whispered harshly to a mature and sharp-featured lady who sat at his right:

'And we seem to have made a mistake when we elected him to be secretary to the council.'

There was a general murmur of assent from the members of the council, in which nearly all joined, excepting a young old maid with frank eyes and cheerful countenance, who was sitting about half-way down the dinner-table, with a vacant seat by her side. She looked at the abashed Fanny Meredith with a compassionate smile of encouragement.

'Since you have not attended to your duty,' said Mr. Leisler severely, checking the helpless secretary on the threshold, 'since you have not seen that the other members of the council received invitations, of course they will not come —we cannot expect them. We must dine by ourselves—thirteen at table. I cannot speak for the others, but to me it is most unpleasant to see those eight empty chairs!'

As the crestfallen Fanny Meredith retreated

hastily from the dining-room, he could not help hearing this rebuke heartily approved by the council.

II.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Jacob Leisler, jun., and Mrs. Vedder, the energetic lady on his right, and Miss Mary Van Dyne, the pleasant-faced old maid farther down on his left, and Mr. Joshua Hoffman, who sat beside her, and the rest of the thirteen members of the council who were present, saw eight empty chairs, which made awkward gaps in the company about the board—although they could count only thirteen at table, it is to be recorded that in reality these eight chairs were not empty. They were filled by those to whom the cards of invitation had been sent—the former members of the council, dead and gone in the score of years and more since the printing of the report which the new secretary had used. To the eyes of the living the eight seats were vacant. To the eyes of one who had power to see the spiritual and intangible they were occupied by those who had been bidden to the feast. How the invitations had reached their addresses no one might know, but they had been received, and they had been accepted; and the invited guests sat at the council as they had been wont to sit there twenty-two years before. Perhaps the invitations had gone to the Dead Letter Office, and so had been forwarded to the dead whose names they bore; perhaps they

had been taken—but speculation is idle. It matters not how or by whom the invitations had been delivered, there sat the ghostly guests, in their places around the dinner-table of the council. There they sat in the eight chairs, which to the eye of man were empty.

It was the first time that the dead had been bidden to this feast of the living. It was the first time since they had laid down the burdens of this world that they had been allowed to mingle with their friends on earth. It was the first time—and they feared it might be the last, and they were eager to make the most of their good fortune. For a long while they sat silently listening with avidity to all stray fragments of news about those whom they had left behind them in the land of the living. Some of these spectral visitors had only recently quitted this life, and perhaps they were the most anxious to learn the sayings and doings of those they had loved and left. Some of them had been dead for years, and their placid faces wore a pleasant expression of restful and comforting tranquillity. One of them, a handsome young fellow in a dark blue uniform with faded shoulder-straps, had fallen twenty-two years before in the repulse of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. Another had gone down in the 'Ville de Nice' in the Bay of Biscay in 1872. A third, a venerable man with silvery hair and a gentle look in his soft gray eyes, had died of old age only a few months before.

Mr. Jacob Leisler, jun., sat at the head of the

table, and at his right hand was Mrs. Vedder, a square-faced lady of an uncertain age, with grizzled hair and a masterful mouth. The chair on her right was apparently empty, to her evident dissatisfaction. Probably her annoyance would have been acutely increased had she been aware that the invisible occupant of this place by her side was Jesse Van Twiller, her first husband, dead these ten years or more, during eight of which she had been another man's wife.

Jesse Van Twiller had been among the earliest to arrive ; and when he found that his wife was to sit next to him he was delighted. No spook ever wore a broader smile than that which graced his features as Mrs. Vedder took her place at table by his side. But his joy was commingled with a portion of apprehension, as though he feared his wife as much as he loved her. He was a little man, of a nervous temperament, with a timid look and an expression of subdued meekness, as though he was used to be overridden by an overbearing woman. He glanced up as his former wife sat down. He seemed disconcerted when her eyes fell on him with no look of welcome recognition. For a moment he wondered if he had offended her in any way since they had parted. Then, all at once, he knew that she had not seen him : he was invisible to mortal eyes. He chafed against this condition ; he wanted her to see him and to know how glad he was to see her. To be there by her side, to be able to stretch his arm about her waist as he had

done in the days of yore, to long to fold her to his heart which beat for her alone, and to be powerless as he was even to communicate to her the fact of his presence—this was most painful. The poor ghost felt that fate was hard on him. He would have given years of his spectral existence for two or three hours of human life.

These were his feelings at first. Then he wondered how she would receive him if she knew he were in her presence. He gazed at her intently as though to read her thoughts. She was older than she was when he had died—there was no doubt about that. She had the same commanding mien, the same superb port, the same majestic sweep of the arm. Yet it seemed to the man who had left her a widow that the air of domineering determination he recalled so well was not a little softened as though from want of use. 'She has missed me!' he said to himself. 'How gladly would I have her scold me now as she used to scold me so often, if only she could see me! She could not rebuke me for being late this time, but she could easily find something else to find fault about. I shouldn't care how much she bullied me, so long as I could tell her I was here. And then,' he concluded cautiously, 'if she made it too hot for me, I could be a ghost again, and she would be so surprised!'

Just then Mr. Leisler spoke to the spouse of the spook.

'I was beginning to fear that we might be de-

prived of your presence too, Mrs. Vedder,' he said. 'Were you not a little late?'

Jesse Van Twiller looked at his old friend Leisler in the greatest surprise. Why had he addressed Mrs. Van Twiller as Mrs. Vedder? The first husband even turned and looked at the chair next to his, on the chance that that was occupied by the lady addressed; but Mr. Leisler's own wife sat there. His astonishment increased as he heard his wife's answer.

'Yes,' she said, 'we were late. But it was not my fault. The doctor is a most unpunctual man.'

'The doctor?' thought Van Twiller. 'What doctor? and what had she to do with any doctor? Had she been ill? She seemed to be in robust health.'

'Dr. Vedder is a busy man,' rejoined Mr. Leisler, 'and perhaps he cannot control his time.'

So it was Dr. Vedder his wife had been waiting for. Van Twiller looked across the table at Dr. Vedder, whom he knew very well and had never liked. Dr. Vedder was a sarcastic man, with a sharp tongue, and a knack of saying disagreeable things. It was Dr. Vedder who had once asserted that Van Twiller had no more sense of humour than a hand-organ. Suddenly, with a sharp pang of jealousy, Van Twiller recalled a vague, fleeting, and half-forgotten memory of Dr. Vedder's admiration for Mrs. Van Twiller. He remembered that the doctor had once declared that he liked a masterful woman, and that Mrs. Van Twiller was

a Katherine with a poor Petruchio quite incapable of taming her.

'That's no reason he should keep his wife waiting,' said the former Mrs. Van Twiller plaintively.

'His wife!' repeated Van Twiller to himself. 'Who is his wife?'

'I was never treated in that way by my first husband,' continued the lady.

'Her first husband!' The poor ghost shrank back. At last he saw the change in the situation. His wife was not his wife any more. She was the wife of Dr. Vedder, a man whom he had disliked always, and whom now he hated. He was seized by a burning rage of jealousy, but he was powerless to express his feelings. His condition was hard to bear, for he could see, he could hear, he could suffer, and he could do nothing.

As Van Twiller was thinking this out hotly, the sharp voice of Dr. Vedder stabbed him suddenly.

'I have noticed,' remarked the doctor, who was seated exactly opposite his wife's first husband, 'that a woman always thinks more highly of a man after he is dead and gone. She is ready enough to praise him when it is too late for the commendation to comfort him. I believe a widow doubly cherishes the memory of a hen-pecked husband.'

With the suave smile of a conscious peacemaker, who sees possible offence in a speech, Mr. Leisler said, 'You are hard on the widows, Doctor.'

'Not at all,' the doctor answered, with a dry little wrinkle at the corners of his mouth, 'not at all. I am a scientific observer, making logical deductions from a multitude of facts. To the man who lives out West, the only good Indian is a dead Indian; so to the widow, the only good husband is the dead husband!'

'I'm sure,' cried Mrs. Vedder indignantly, 'that Mr. Van Twiller would never have said anything like that.'

'Certainly not,' her husband replied. 'Van Twiller couldn't, for Van Twiller wasn't a scientific observer.'

A covert sneer in Dr. Vedder's tone as he said this cut little Van Twiller to the soul, and again he longed for material hands that he might clutch his rival by the throat. At the thought of his absolute inability to do aught for himself, he shivered with despair.

It was perhaps some frigid emanation from Van Twiller which affected Mrs. Vedder's nerves, for she shuddered slightly before replying to her husband.

'It is not for us to bandy words now about Mr. Van Twiller's attainments,' she remarked deliberately. 'He was truly a gentleman, with all the mildness of a gentleman, quite incapable of giving any one a harsh word or a cross look.'

'In fact he had absolutely no faults at all,' said Dr. Vedder sarcastically. But if he could then have seen the expression on the pallid face of

his predecessor, he would have been in a position to contradict his wife's last assertion.

'He had very few indeed!' replied his wife; 'in my eyes he was perfect!'

She paused for a second, and Van Twiller wished that she had believed in his perfection while he was alive. Then she added bitterly, 'To know him was to love him!'

The dry little wrinkle returned to the corners of Dr. Vedder's mouth as he answered quietly, 'Perhaps so—I didn't know him well!'

And again the poor ghost writhed in invisible anguish, utterly helpless to resent the insult.

'I remember Mr. Van Twiller distinctly,' remarked Mr. Leisler blandly; 'he was an easy-going and good-natured man, with a kind word for everybody.'

'In fact, he was everybody's friend,' Dr. Vedder returned, 'and nobody's enemy but his own. His best quality in my eyes is that he is not here to-night.'

The doctor could not know that the little man at whom he was girding was separated from him by the breadth of the table only, and was suffering with his whole being as every sneer reached its mark far more surely than he who shot the chance arrow could guess.

'You are bitter,' said Mr. Leisler easily; 'I fear you are a misanthrope.'

The doctor laughed a little, and answered, 'No, I'm not exactly a misanthrope or even a miso-

gynist, but I have ceased to be philanthropic since I discovered that man is descended from a monkey.'

Mrs. Vedder was about to make a hasty reply to this, when she caught the doctor's eye. To the surprise of Van Twiller, she hesitated, checked herself suddenly, and said nothing. He wondered how it was that his wife had changed; he knew that she had never quailed before his eye; and he found himself doubting whether he would not have preferred to see her show her old spirit. He saw that she was sadly tamed now; and he marvelled why he should regret the quenching of her fiery spirit. She did not seem the same to him, and he missed the old mastery to which he was accustomed. This blunted the joy of the meeting he had anticipated hopefully ever since he had received the invitation. His wife was no longer his. She was not even the woman he had loved, honoured, and obeyed for years. The poor ghost felt lonelier than he had ever felt before. He began to regret that he had been permitted again to come on earth.

A waiter had filled Dr. Vedder's glass. He took it in his hand. 'No,' he said, 'I'm not a philanthropist; I take no stock in the aggressive optimism of the sentimentalists. In fact, I suppose I'm a persistent pessimist. What is my fellow-man to me—or my fellow-woman either?'

Mr. Jacob Leisler, jun., was not a man whose perceptions were fine or quick, but he was moved

to resent clumsily the offensiveness of these words.

'But your wife——' he began.

'Oh, my wife!' interrupted Dr. Vedder; 'my wife and I are one, you know.'

Van Twiller looked at Mrs. Vedder to see how she would take this. She said nothing. She smiled acidly. It was not doubtful that she was greatly changed.

'I try to shape my course by the doctrine of enlightened selfishness,' continued the doctor. 'Let us enjoy life while we may. Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die. In the struggle for existence the fittest survive and the weakest are weeded out—and so much the better!'

Both Mrs. Vedder and Mr. Leisler made ready to reply, when the doctor suddenly went on, sharpening his voice to its keenest edge:

'So much the better for him! Your dead man is your happy man. He has no enemies, and even his widow praises him—especially if she has remarried. In fact, he has all the virtues, now he has no use for any of them.' Then the doctor raised his glass. 'The toast of the English in India suggests true wisdom, after all:

> "Ho! stand to your glasses steady!
> The world is a world of lies;
> A cup to the dead already,
> And hurrah for the next man that dies!"'

Mr. Leisler drew himself up with dignity and

addressed the doctor with a stiff severity of manner:

'I am surprised, Dr. Vedder, that you should express such views of life on such an occasion as this. I confess I do not hold with you at all. I——'

'You cannot lure me into a debate at dinner,' the doctor answered, as Mr. Leisler paused for fit words to express his complicated feelings. 'I never get into a discussion at table, for the man who isn't hungry always has the best of the argument.'

The unfortunate spook, forced to listen to this unmannerly talk of the man who had married his widow, sat silent and abashed. He knew not what to think. He did not recognise his wife. When he was alive she had been full of fiery vigour and of undaunted spirit. He would never have dared to address her thus boldly and to brave the wrath which was wont to flame out, at odd moments, like forked lightning. In dumb wonder he waited for her swift protest; but she said nothing; whereat he marvelled not a little.

Mr. Leisler asked himself why Dr. Vedder was unusually disagreeable this evening, for the doctor was a clever man and could make a pleasant impression when he chose. With the hope of turning the talk into a more cheerful channel Mr. Leisler addressed Mrs. Vedder.

'Isn't Miss Van Dyne looking very well to-night?' he asked.

Mrs. Vedder looked down the table at the cheery and young-looking old maid.

'Yes,' she answered, after a moment's hesitation, 'she seems almost happy; but then, she is not married.'

'She has been faithful to the memory of her lost love,' said Mr. Leisler. 'Let me see—how many years is it now since Captain De Ruyter was killed at Gettysburg?'

'You don't mean to tell me that you believe that a woman has been in love with a dead man for twenty-two years, do you?' Dr. Vedder asked with an incredulous smile.

'Why not?' returned his wife.

The doctor evaded an answer to this direct question. 'If your diagnosis is right, she has had a dull enough time of it,' he said. 'And she has nothing to show for her devotion.'

'Virtue is its own reward,' Mr. Leisler remarked judicially.

'But love isn't,' the doctor replied. 'Love is like this champagne,' and he raised his glass; 'it is very sparkling when it is young, but as it gets older it loses its flavour.' He emptied the glass and set it down. 'And if one is all alone with it, there may be a headache the next morning.'

'What has made you so sarcastic this evening?' asked Mr. Leisler.

'I don't know,' Dr. Vedder answered. 'I am in company with evil spirits, I think. If I were a believer in such things, I should say that I was subject to an adverse influence. And I was all right when I came. Perhaps it is this wretched dinner.'

Perhaps it was the dinner, but little Van Twiller was conscious of a throb of ill-natured joy at the thought that it was possibly his presence, all unknown as it was, which had thus disturbed the equanimity of the doctor and revealed his lower nature. He looked at Mrs. Vedder, and he saw she was eating her dinner slowly and in silence, with a stiffening of the muscles of the face—a sign he had recognised readily enough.

'After all,' continued the doctor, 'these are the two great banes of man's existence—dyspepsia and matrimony.'

'Come, come,' Mr. Leisler said cheerfully, 'you must not abuse marriage; it is the chief end of life.'

'It was very nearly the end of mine,' returned Dr. Vedder; 'I caught such a cold in the church that I have not been into one since.'

Just then one of the waiters came to Mr. Leisler with a request that he should change his place for a little while, and take his seat at the other end of the table, where there was a vacant chair. Glad of an excuse to get away from a man in ill-humour, Mr. Leisler apologised to Mrs. Vedder and withdrew to join his other friends.

Van Twiller saw a red spot burning brightly on Mrs. Vedder's cheek, and he knew that this was another danger-signal.

She bent forward towards her husband, and in a low voice, trembling a little with suppressed ire, she hissed across the table, 'I see what you are

after! But you will not succeed. I can keep my temper though I bite my tongue out. It takes two to quarrel, remember!'

'It takes two to get married,' retorted Dr. Vedder, 'so that proves nothing.'

For the first time the poor ghost saw his wife's eyes fill with tears.

'Mr. Van Twiller never treated me so,' she said hurriedly. 'I wish he were alive now!'

The dry little wrinkle came back to the corners of the doctor's mouth, but he made no reply.

Little Van Twiller looked from one to the other, as they stared at each other. Then he said to himself, sighing softly:

'Well, well, perhaps it is better as it is!'

III.

MISS MARY VAN DYNE was sitting almost in the centre of one side of the long dinner-table. At her right was Mr. Joshua Hoffman, a man whose heart was as large as his purse was long, and who kept both open to the call of the suffering. At her left was a vacant chair—or what seemed so to the eyes of the living men and women at the table. They did not know that it was occupied by Remsen de Ruyter, whose maiden widow Mary Van Dyne had held herself to be ever since a bullet had reached his heart on the heights of Gettysburg. For nearly twenty-two years now she had lived on, alone in the world, but never lonely, for she had given her-

self up to good works. Her presence was welcome in the children's ward of every hospital, and the love of these little ones nourished her soul and sustained her spirit. Between her and Joshua Hoffman there were bonds of sympathy, and they had many things in common. The good old man was very fond of the brave little woman who had tried to turn her private sorrow to the benefit of the helpless and the innocent.

They were glad to find themselves side by side at table, and they talked to each other with interest.

'You are not really old, Mr. Hoffman,' she was saying; 'you look very young yet. To-night I wouldn't give you fifty!'

'My dear young lady, you haven't fifty to give,' he answered with a smile; 'and if you had, why I should then have a hundred and twenty-five—which is more than my share of years.'

'You are not really seventy-five?' she asked.

'Really, I am seventy-five. I am a past-due coupon, as I heard one of the boys saying on the street the other day,' returned Joshua Hoffman, with a smile as pleasant as hers.

'And how old am I?' she inquired.

'Whatever your age is,' he answered, 'to-night you do not look it!'

'Shall I arise and curtsey for that?' she asked, blushing with pleasure at his courtly compliment. 'You see I like to be flattered still, although I am an old maid of two-score years.'

'Really now, my child,' said the old man, 'you are not forty? Let me see—it does not seem so very long ago since he came and told me how happy he was because you had promised to marry him. Does it pain you to talk of him now?'

'I think of him always, day and night. Why should I not be glad to talk about him with you whom he loved, and to whom he owed so much?'

'He was a good boy,' Joshua Hoffman continued in his kindly voice. 'I can recall the day he told me about you; it was a fine, clear morning in early spring.'

'It was the 16th of May, 1863,' she said simply. 'He had asked me to marry him the night before, and he said that you were the first he would tell.'

'He was a good boy, and a brave boy, and he died like a man,' said the old man gently. Then he relapsed into silence as his thoughts went back to the dark days of the war.

Miss Mary Van Dyne was also thinking of the past. Unconsciously she lived again in her youth when she first saw Remsen de Ruyter, a bright handsome boy, scarcely older than she was: he was only twenty-one when he died. They had loved each other from the first, although it was a whole long winter before he had dared to tell her —a long winter of delicious doubt and fearful ecstasy. She recalled all the circumstances of his avowal of his love, and her cheeks burned as she thought of the gush of unspeakable joy which had

filled her heart as he folded her in his arms for the first time. She remembered how, two nights after, before they had told the news to any one but her mother and his benefactor Joshua Hoffman, she sat next to him at this annual dinner of the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society; they were the very youngest members, and it was the first time they had been asked. So strong was the rush of memory of the happy scene, that she gave a quick glance at the place on her left, as though half-expecting to see him seated there still. And there he was by her side, although she could not see him now.

He was there, but he could not speak to her; he could not tell her of his presence; he could not tell her how he loved her still, and more than ever. It was hard. Yet he was glad to be by her side, to see her, to look into her frank face, to gaze on her noble eyes.

And she felt comforted she knew not why, as though by an invisible presence. Her heart was lifted up. Although the grass had woven a green blanket over his grave for now more than twenty years, he did not seem so far from her. She hoped she would not have so long to wait before she might join him, never again to be parted. Then her thoughts turned to the last time she had seen him, the morning his regiment had left New York for the front. It was a beautiful day early in June when he came to bid her farewell for the last time. They talked all the morning seriously and hope-

fully. Then the hour came at last, and all too soon. She bore herself bravely ; without a tear she kissed him and held him in her arms for a minute, and bade him go. She watched him as he walked away. How well she could recall everything which her senses had noted unconsciously during the two minutes before he paused at the corner of the street to wave his hand before he vanished for ever. There were roses beginning to blow in the little bit of green before the house ; there was a hand-organ in the next street from which faint strains of 'John Brown's Body' came over the house-tops ; the noon whistle of a neighbouring factory suddenly broke the silence as he blew her a kiss, and went out of her sight to his death. Then she had been able to get to her room somehow—she never knew how—and to throw herself on her bed before she broke down.

The memory was bitter and sweet, but never before had it been as sweet. She turned her eyes on the vacant chair by her side, and involuntarily she reached out her hand. It grasped nothing, it felt nothing, yet her fingers tingled as with a shock of joy. She gazed at the empty chair again in charmed wonder. She could not tell what subtle influence of peace and comfort enveloped her as she mused upon the past with her arm resting on the chair beside her. Then her glance fell on a card beside the plate, and with a sudden suffusion of the eyes she read his name. The new secretary of the council had used the list of twenty-two years

before, and again his place had been set beside hers. The tears which veiled her sight hid the empty chair from her for a minute, and if she turned her head she might almost fancy that he was seated there. It was a fancy only, but it pleased her to indulge in it. It brought back the happy past. It brought him back, almost, for a fleeting minute.

And he, as he sat there, could make no sign. With the keen intuition of love, he read her thoughts in her face. He knew that she was thinking of him, and that in the thought of him she was happy again.

And thus the long dinner drew to an end at last.

When the president gave the signal for the withdrawal into another room that the usual business meeting of the council might take place, the members rose together. Joshua Hoffman was silent, as though he divined her mood and sympathetically respected it. He offered her his arm, and she took it, looking back regretfully, with a longing and lingering gaze, at the place where they had sat side by side.

IV.

As the living members of the council left the dining-room, the ghostly guests gathered together to talk over what they had seen and heard. Only Remsen de Ruyter was silent; his feelings were

too sacred to find vent in words. He alone wore a smile of consolation and comfort. The rest chattered along in tumultuous conversation.

'It has been a strange experience,' said the very old gentleman—'a very strange experience.'

'More painful than pleasant, I think,' little Van Twiller remarked.

'I thought we had been invited as a compliment,' said another of the ghosts discontentedly, 'but it seems it was all a mistake of the new secretary—Fanny Meredith, they call him.'

'Excellent young man!' the old gentleman declared with emphasis—'an excellent young man; so thoughtful of him; so considerate of the feelings of his elders. I shall accept his invitation next year.'

'So shall I!' added several voices.

'Oh, I'll come too,' said Jesse Van Twiller. 'I want to see what will happen next.'

Only Remsen de Ruyter said nothing.

V.

BUT long before the next annual dinner of the council of the Saint Nicholas Relief Society, the resignation of Mr. Francis Meredith had been requested, and in his stead there had been elected a secretary of more trustworthy habits; and the new secretary was very particular in sending out the invitations to the next annual dinner.

So the poor ghosts never had another chance

If they had been asked again, there would have been one more of them, for ten days after the dinner which Fanny Meredith had so miserably mismanaged Dr. Vedder died suddenly.

The new secretary took great pains also in the ordering of the dinner, and in the arranging of the guests. His efforts were rewarded ; there was general satisfaction expressed by the members of the council ; and he was congratulated on the most successful dinner ever given. Amid the pervading gaiety of the occasion there was only one guest who regretted the dinner of the year before. This was Miss Mary Van Dyne. She said nothing about it to any one ; indeed, she was accustomed to keep her feelings to herself. But she missed an inexplicable something which had made the other dinner the most delightful memory of her later life.

ESTHER FEVEREL

ESTHER FEVEREL.

ABOUT a mile beyond the straggling outskirts of a New England village once as young and energetic as any in the land, but to-day so old and exhausted that it seems to have sunk into restful sleep, there stands a house built of dull gray stone, and bearing bravely still the onslaught of the New England winters it has withstood for now nearly two centuries. This house, beginning at last to bear witness to the wear of time, is one of the oldest in America; it is one of the few buildings of the seventeenth century which survive to this last quarter of the nineteenth. To us who live in an age of rush and glitter the appearance of the house is in no wise remarkable except for its evident antiquity; nor should we turn aside now to consider what the contemporaries of the first owner were wont to call the stately nobility of its proportions. But our eyes are not the eyes of the early colonists of New England, and the stone house which Judge Feverel built was long a wonder for miles around. More than one fast-day sermon had been directed against its magnificence, which seemed out of place amid the humble beginnings of the growing colony.

There yet lingered a tradition that the house had once been called 'The Judge's Folly.' But the nickname had died away long ago as the magnificence of the house had faded. And as time, unhasting and unresting, sped slowly, the house of the stern and fiery Roger Feverel had fallen from grace, and the fortunes of the elder branch of the Feverels were fallen with it.

As the late November sun sent its declining rays across the low Western hills, and gilded the substantial chimney which rose above the slant roof of the house which Judge Feverel had built, a man on horseback drew rein before the door. He looked at the house like one who had never seen it before; but his face lighted up at once with a glance of recognition and a smile of satisfaction that he had come to the end of his travels at last, and reached a haven of rest. He sprang from his horse, which he tethered to a post at the edge of the path. He was a handsome young fellow—for young he was yet, in spite of his having already accomplished half of a man's allotted span of life. He had dark wavy hair, quick black eyes, and a frank face, on which there might be seen at times a dreamy look. His walk indicated a resolute self-reliance, and he passed up the unfamiliar path as though he had a right to be there.

As he stood on the low step before the door of the house, after ringing the bell, he turned to look at the little garden which surrounded the house, and at the few scant fields which were attached to

it; then he raised his head with a little touch of pride as he recalled the time when the owner of the house was the owner also of the land for a mile or more on every side of it. One by one these broad acres had slipped from the loose hands of the Feverels, and generation after generation the Feverels had become poorer and poorer, as though there had been a curse on them and on their house.

'On this house there may be a curse, and there is reason for it,' thought John Feverel, as he stood for the first time at the door of the home of the Feverels; 'but the curse, if curse there be, is on this house only, and not on the Feverels at large. It is on them, perhaps, who remain here and keep up the flame of hatred, but it is not on those who have gone forth into the world. There was no curse on my grandfather when he, the younger son, went out from here and prospered, while the elder son remained here and saw his substance shrivel up. There was no curse on my father, who made his way in the world without hindrance from ill fortune. There is no curse on me as yet. Standing here on the threshold of the house of the Feverels, I can look back over my past with pleasure, for I have been happier than most men, and I can look forward to the future with hope.'

Receiving no answer to his repeated ring, John Feverel rapped sharply on the panel of the door. Under the force of the blow, the door opened silently, and disclosed a broad hall, at the farther

end of which, facing the entrance, there was a large fire-place, where a few sticks of wood were burning brightly. The visitor stood for a moment on the door-step, as though awaiting an invitation to enter. Then he walked into the house and looked about him. The hall was spacious, old-fashioned, quaint. The wood-work had reached a stage of decay when care could no longer conceal the marks of age and use. Everything was clean and worn-out. The tidiness and neatness, the nosegay of fresh flowers in a vase by a window, the little touches of colour elsewhere, revealed a woman's hand. Yet the house seemed to be empty. There was no one to welcome John Feverel to the home of his ancestors.

'Uncle Timothy,' he called. 'Cousin Esther!' But there came no answer. The house was as deserted as it was desolate. From its stillness it might be a habitation of the dead, where no one dwelt but the ghosts of the past.

He called again, and again he received no reply.

Neither of his kinsfolk was at home to greet him. And yet it was to see them almost as much as to take possession of the property that he had cut short his travels and crossed the ocean in haste.

John Feverel was the grandson of a John Feverel who left this Eastern home of the family to seek his fortune in the West. In this undertaking he had prospered as no Feverel before him

had prospered since the fire had first smoked on the hearth of 'The Judge's Folly.' He worked and made money: he married and saw his children grow up about him; and in his old age he rested in peace before he died happily. His son, John Feverel again, made yet another move to the West, and he prospered as his father had prospered. When he died he left to his only son, the John Feverel who now stood in the hall of the house built by Roger Feverel nearly two hundred years ago, three good things: a brave heart, a keen head, and a modest fortune. To these John Feverel added a quality of his own, an inquiring mind ever athirst for knowledge. He put his wits to work and did not cease from labour until he had doubled the fortune left him by his father. Although he was then barely thirty-five years of age, and although he saw before him the prospect of great riches, he gave up his business and rested satisfied with the comfortable competence he had attained. He felt that he had a more important work in life than the mere making of money. Just what this future work might be he did not know, but he was ready to undertake whatever seemed to him fit and worthy. In the meanwhile he set about improving himself by travel. He had more than his share of that mysticism of the West which matches so curiously with the occult temperament of the Orient. Even as a boy he had become an adept in the cabalistic secrets of the Rosicrucians. As a man he travelled throughout the East, seeking to

sate his desire to gaze on strange things, and to penetrate the obscure mysteries of strange people. He had sought to discover the means whereby the wonder-workers of the East wrought their miracles. He was learned in the lore of the alchemists, and he had traversed Arabia in search of the surviving repositories of their recondite wisdom. To all that he saw he applied his shrewd common-sense. The results of his experiment and investigation he kept to himself; but he walked among men as one who has peered deep into the enigmas of life and pondered upon them long and earnestly.

It may be that, for a little space, he stood in danger of sinking into the lethargy of Buddhistic contemplation. He was far up in the Himalayas when he received a letter which suddenly recalled him to a sharp self-consciousness. It was from Esther Feverel, the only daughter of Timothy Feverel, the last survivor of the elder branch of the old Judge's family. It told him in few and simple words that her father's affairs were hopelessly involved, and that a mortgage on the old house was about to be foreclosed; and it suggested that perhaps he might like to buy it, so that the house should still be owned by a Feverel. John Feverel had never seen any of his New England relatives, and he had given them little thought; but with the old house, with the strange story of its building, and with the legends which clustered about its hearth, he was perfectly familiar. He had sat by his grandfather's knee, night after night—

during the festival reunions which brought together the various members of the Western branch of the family—and he had treasured up every word which fell from his grandfather's lips, when he told of 'The Judge's Folly,' and of the fire on its hearth, and of the ill fortune which followed the house and its inmates. To have the house pass into his possession was a boon he had not dared to hope for.

The letter which informed him that its purchase was possible was written in the name of Timothy Feverel, but the hand was the hand of his daughter. John Feverel had studied chirography as he had studied whatever else might serve to increase his knowledge of men. He was wont to read character by handwriting with a success often startling to himself. The symbols of character he deciphered in the sincere handwriting of Esther Feverel made him wish to meet her and know more of her.

He wrote to her at once, venturing to call her cousin, and telling her that he had given orders to have the place bought for him whenever the mortgagee saw fit to foreclose. Furthermore, assuming the liberty of a kinsman, he begged that she and her father would continue to live in the house as before, taking care of it for him, against the time when he should return to America.

A few months later, when he had begun to be weary of his years of wandering in search of the unknowable, he had received another letter from Esther, letting him know that the sale had taken place, and that the house was his, and thanking

him for the kindness extended to her father and herself—a kindness of which they would gladly avail themselves until his return. So gentle was this letter, so sweet in its maidenly modesty, so frank and womanly was it, so charming was the character revealed by its chirography, that it wrought a change in John Feverel's views of life He abandoned a daring trip to the chief temples of China, and made his way back to America.

Now, as he stood for the first time in the home of the Feverels, he had a sharp feeling of disappointment that Esther was not there to bid him welcome. Before he had paced the hall half a dozen times, this feeling gave way, and he began even to be glad that he was alone, and that his first impressions of the old house might be pure of all admixture of the opinions of another, even were that other his cousin Esther. So accurate had been his grandfather's description, and so retentive had been his own memory, that he felt at home in the house as soon as he entered the door. He gazed from the windows, and the view was to him as though he had seen it before in some former existence. The tall clock on the stairs looked down on him as benignantly as it had looked down on the other children of the family in the two centuries since it first began to measure eternity into time. The mirror over the mantel-piece at the end of the hall reflected his image as it had reflected the image of eight generations of Feverels since the old Judge set it against the chimney. The ancient

chair before the fire extended its arms as hospitably to him as it had to his great-grandfather, the last of his line who had sat in it. On John Feverel these things had a strange effect; he felt as though he had come home at last—and for the first time.

As he sat himself down in the chair before the fire and glanced up at the mirror, he saw an expression on his face he had never known there before. He had a strange presentiment that he was at the turning-point of his career. It was as though he were halting at the threshold of a new life, pausing for a moment to look back across the past, and yet regarding the future hopefully. He lowered his eyes, and they fell on the date carven deep into the heavy timbers of the mantel-piece—1692. For nearly two hundred years had the fire been alight on that hearth day and night, winter and summer, year after year. There the flame had burned and smouldered and blazed since the Judge, in his fanaticism and wrath, had brought home a brand from the burning of a poor wretch whom he had sentenced to death for an abhorrent crime of petty treason. On that hearth, beneath the faded tiles, whereon were depicted Cain and Abel, David and Goliath, Sisera and Jael, and other characters in Biblical scenes of bloodshed, the fire had never ceased rising and falling since Roger Feverel had kindled it for the first time with a brand from the burning, that it might be an enduring witness to his righteousness, and that it should be ready at all

times in the future to fire the torch whenever the same awful vengeance might need to be taken once again. Roger Feverel was dead and buried, and the hatreds and the beliefs and the heresies of his time were dead and buried also, but the fire he kindled was still smoking on his hearth. Roger Feverel's son and his grandson and his great-grandson had passed away, one after another ; but the fire that the founder of the family had lighted when he built the house lived on, and was as young as ever. Generation followed generation to the grave, but the fire of intolerance still burned on its altar as though Roger Feverel had made a covenant with his descendants that they should feed the flame for ever. So strongly had the traditions of the family seized John Feverel that he bent forward and laid across the embers two pieces from the piles of cut wood ready to his hand on either side of the fireplace.

As he lay back again in the chair he saw in the mirror the reflection of his smile, for he was half conscious that his humorous scepticism mated ill with the fanatic intolerance of the old Judge who had set light to that fire. He wondered whether Roger Feverel had also looked into the mirror as he heaped fuel upon the flame. No doubt the Judge had seen the look on his own dark face, though he knew not how to read its meaning. The glass had hung there since the fire first flamed. In it had been reflected the life history of the Feverels. Across the surface of that frail glass had passed the

image of the pride and the joys and the sorrows of Roger Feverel and of his descendants. It had seen their youth and their old age ; it had seen their sufferings, and it may be their death. It had been a silent witness to their prosperity, and, after many years, to their poverty, but never to their disgrace or their shame, for they always held their heads high, and their poverty was never tarnished with dishonour.

As John Feverel sat in the chair before the fire and gazed up into the mirror he thought of these things, and he wished that these scenes might be evoked from the past, and shown again in the glass wherein they had been reflected as they happened. He wondered what the Judge would have thought of the magic mirrors of Japan, in which a vanished scene may be made to reappear. Surely the Judge would have seen nothing strange in the tale, but he would have been prompt to punish any man who should make use of such a device of the devil.

John Feverel recalled the temple on the flanks of Fusiyama wherein the Japanese priests preserved jealously the most potent of these magic mirrors. It was in this temple that—by one of those curious reproductions in strange countries of the rites and mysteries of ancient civilisation—a perpetual fire was cherished on the altar, guarded night and day, as the virgins of Roma kept up the sacred flame of Vesta. When a certain mysteriously compounded preparation was thrown upon this fire, a dense smoke arose and veiled the magic mirror, which

hung just above the altar, and it was through the dim haze of this smoke that the pictures of the past became visible in the glass.

Suddenly John Feverel sprang to his feet. It had struck him that here in 'The Judge's Folly' in New England there was an ever-burning fire beneath a mirror just as there was in the Japanese temple on the side of Fusiyama. And at the same time he remembered that he had begged and bribed a priest of the temple to give him a portion of the preparation thrown upon the fire beneath the magic mirror. With infinite precaution the priest had confided it to him, incased in a tiny silver ball, the surface of which was curiously wrought with a mystic device. This ball, the contents of which he had intended to submit to chemical analysis whenever occasion served, he had worn ever since attached to his watch-chain as a charm. As he thought of it his fingers closed upon it, and the worn links of the chain parted and left the ball in his hand. It was as though the inanimate thing had whispered to him that the time had come when it could be of use.

Obeying an impulse which he felt to be well-nigh irresistible, John Feverel drew forward the scattered fragments of the fire which had burned on that hearth for nearly twice a hundred years. Then, with a single turn of his wrist, he twisted apart the silver hemispheres which contained the magical compound of the Japanese temple. A white powder fell from them upon the glowing

embers, a pungent aroma filled the air, and a thick smoke arose, veiling the mirror from view. As the cool evening breeze, playing through the open door, caused the cloud of smoke to waver and shift from side to side, John Feverel, reclining in the chair before the fire, felt as one looking through a glass darkly. Figures, dim and indistinct, seemed to be visible in the mirror, into which he peered resolutely, calling up the past with the whole force of his will. He sat motionless, and gave himself up to the spell. His whole being was attuned in harmony with the moment. Whether it was memory, or imagination aided by memory, or whether the charm had veritably some occult potency, mattered little. As he gazed into the mirror through the circling smoke which rose steadily from the fire beneath he saw visions, and in time they took form and colour. Some scenes stood out more vividly than others, to John Feverel's delight, for he soon found that he saw more clearly what he was most familiar with, and what he most wished to see, as though the mirror responded to some secret sympathy of his soul. He beheld the three sons of the house of Feverel, the brothers of Esther, dead before she was born, boys all three of them, but manly and full of spirit; he saw them come to bid farewell to their mother, as they went forth, clad in dark blue, musket on shoulder, on the long march which should end only with their death, one on the plains of Virginia, and one in the bayous of Louisiana, and one on the hill

at Gettysburg ; and the shot which killed this last reached the heart of the mother, and was fatal, though she lingered long enough to clasp her little daughter in her arms before she followed her boys across the dark threshold of death.

Then a thick cloud of smoke rolled across the mirror, as though a volley had been fired over their graves, and as this drifted away, John Feverel, looking fixedly in the glass, saw the open door of the house, and a little maid went forth and gave a glass of water to a courtly old gentleman, who remained uncovered before her while he quenched his thirst. He knew that the little maid was his grandfather's sister, and he recognised the courtly old gentleman as one who had come to bring us help in time of direst need, and who was, many years later, on a visit to America as the guest of the nation.

As this pleasant vision faded away softly and was resolved into nothing, there fell upon the ear of the man who was peering into the mirror, with all his faculties at their utmost tension—there fell upon his ear as it had been a rattle of drums, and he saw a company of redcoats drawn up before the house, and on the door-step, confronting them sturdily, whilst she patted the babe at her breast, stood the beautiful Rachel Feverel, wife of Colonel Francis Feverel, parleying with the captain of the British troops, and bandying words with him pertly, that he might delay, all to give the Continentals time to rally and return and cut them off.

While he looked the scene changed, and the rattle of drums was drowned by shrieks and shrill yells like the cries of wild beasts. The door was closed and barred, and defended by half a score of strong men. The stanch shutters of the windows were firmly fastened, and men were firing through the loop-holes. Fiery-headed arrows fell against the door now and again, and were extinguished just as they were about to fire the house. But though the painted Indians encompassed them on every side, and escape was impossible, and death was waiting for them, and a fate worse than death, the women of the family were not craven; some of them were loading the muskets, every shot from which hit the living mark it was aimed at; and some were gathered in a group about the fire, melting lead from the roof and running it into bullet-moulds. A little of the water into which the hot bullets were dropped fell upon the roaring logs on the hearth, and the white steam rushed up and bedimmed the mirror so that John Feverel could see nothing more for a long while.

At last the steam and the smoke parted again and left the glass clear. The hall was silent and deserted; and Roger Feverel paced slowly and thoughtfully up and down, from the hearth he had lighted with a brand from the burning he had decreed, to the door which shut out the glory of the summer sun. Judge Feverel was not an old man even then, though he had aged since the day when he had done his duty at Hadley fight, by the

side and under the orders of the gray warrior who came forth mysteriously to lead the colonists to victory, and who was recognised as Goffe the regicide. As he strode up and down the hall of 'The Judge's Folly' he did not note a light footstep upon the stair, and he did not see a slight and graceful girlish figure, until his daughter stole her arm in his as he turned on his heel near the door. When Roger Feverel felt her gentle touch his hard face softened, and he gave her a look of deep affection mingled with solicitude. John Feverel recalled the family tradition of the Judge's daughter, who began to sicken and fade as soon as she set foot in the house her father had built; she was his favourite of all his children, in so far at least as his stern justice allowed him to make any distinction between them. As she leaned on her father's arm she seemed so fragile that a puff of the winter breeze would blow her away, and it was true that she did not live out the first December in the new house. She turned with her father and drew near the fire, and for the first time her face became visible to John Feverel. He looked at her with surprise, for he recognised her—at least he had a vague feeling that he had beheld her face before. The beautiful mouth, the tender eyes, the delicate wave of the hair drawn tightly back, were familiar to him, like a face seen in a dream. There came a sudden thickening of the misty vapour which enwrapped the mirror, and for a moment he seemed to see her image upon this unsubstantial curtain;

and then he remembered where it was that he had first beheld the face of the Judge's daughter, and he knew it was the face of his promised bride.

A year before, John Feverel had been in Egypt, and one day he had joined a little party who wished to view the Sphinx by night. After the pale green sunset had died away, and the ruddy after-glow had followed it swiftly, and the short twilight had given place to the darkness of night, the party sat around a fire before the house where they were to sleep. While John Feverel was lying on the sand, under the shadow of the Sphinx, musing on the riddle of life, he was suddenly awakened to the emptiness of existence by the arrival of a little band of strolling performers, one of whom, apparently a Hindoo, and a man of unusual skill and presence, performed the customary wonders of the itinerant magician. A dragoman hinted to one of the party that this Hindoo had great powers, and that he had been known to reveal to a man the portrait of his future bride. John Feverel, who had drawn on one side, took no part in the clamorous outcry of his fellow-travellers for an immediate exhibition of his peculiar power, and he was much surprised when the Hindoo turned to him gravely and offered to work the wonder for him, and for him alone. With his keen interest in thaumaturgy, Feverel accepted the offer. The Hindoo made two smaller fires equidistant from that around which the travellers sat, and at each he stationed one of the two boys who

served as his assistants. Then the Hindoo looked into John Feverel's hand and studied its lines for a moment. Producing a package of some strange Oriental incense, he bade Feverel cast a handful of it on the fire. As he obeyed, a thick column of smoke shot into the air, and in the centre of this column he saw a woman's face. It was the same face he was to see again in the mirror.

It was a face he could now never more forget. It had been revealed to him twice in a vision, once in a column of smoke in Egypt, and once again in a mirror here in New England. He wondered if he was never to behold her in more tangible reality, and to meet her face to face in actual life, where he might take her by the hand and bid her mark the beatings of his heart, and ask her to share his life through good fortune and ill.

He sat silently and long, dreaming and musing. When he aroused himself at last, the rising smoke was now only a thin thread, and the fire had shrivelled to a few scant embers. He had a suspicion that there was some ingredient in the Japanese preparation he had sprinkled over the flames which had sufficed to quench them finally. For the first time in the two centuries since Roger Feverel had lighted the fire on that hearth it burned low, and although it yet lingered and might be resuscitated by effort, it was well-nigh dead. Through the open door the slant rays of the setting sun entered the hall and bathed it in an immaterial glory.

John Feverel raised his eyes again to the mirror to see if haply he might gain another glimpse of the face which had moved him so strangely. The glass was no longer wreathed in vapour, and yet again it reflected the same face, not dimly now, nor indistinct, not as a phantom, intangible and tantalizing, but alive, and with the smile of life and health and youth. Then he heard a light footfall, and he sprang to his feet and stood before the woman of his vision. And she stood before him in flesh and blood, this woman whom he had seen only in the mirror of the past. Mouth and eyes and hair, and the beauty of which these were symbols, were to him unmistakable. Even her dress in its simplicity recalled that of Roger Feverel's daughter. The beauty which in the evanescent visions had been vague and fleeting was in life beyond all question. It was the beauty of New England, and it dwelt as much in delicacy of colour as in the regularity of outline. It was beauty not only of face, but also of figure, as firm, in fact, as it seemed fragile. But perhaps the chief charm lay in the eyes, dreamy yet noble, full of frankness and candour. John Feverel stood before her entranced, or rather as one awakened from reverie to a delightful reality.

As she came toward him, with a brilliant smile of welcome, she held out her hand.

'It is Cousin John, I am sure,' she said. 'Though we did not expect you until to-morrow, I

know you. We Feverels are a marked race, with our dark eyes and light hair.'

'And you are Esther?' he said.

'Yes, I am Esther,' was her answer.

The voice was the voice of an angel in its sweetness and purity. John Feverel almost hesitated to believe that he was not dreaming still, that he was no longer peering into the mirror in which he had beheld her only a few minutes before.

'I am sorry that we were not here to welcome you this afternoon, but my father went into town, and I was away in the orchard, and I did not know you were here until I saw your horse.'

He took the hand she extended to him, and murmured inarticulate acknowledgment. He found few words, though he was wont to be ready. His tongue refused its office, but his love spake from his eyes. Her glance fell, under his steady gaze, and a slight blush crimsoned her cheek. It was as though, having seen her once, he did not wish ever again to lose sight of her, and to be compelled to rely on incantation for her reappearance. She hesitated for a little space, and then she continued: 'I hope you will be happy here, as I have been. It is a dear old house, and I have spent my life here, and I love it. But I fear you will not be content with what pleased an ignorant girl, after your wanderings all over the world.'

'What I have seen of the house seems like a glimpse of Paradise,' he said, when at last he found his voice. 'And I should be hard to please if I

were to wish to leave it. I am sure that I shall not want to roam again. I shall be content here now;' and to these last words he gave a deep meaning, so that the blush mantled her cheek again. 'I have come home to rest by my own fireside.'

As he said this she cast an involuntary glance upon the hearth. Then she sprang forward with feverish haste: 'You have let the fire go out,' she said, reproachfully, and it has been burning here day and night, summer and winter, ever since the house was built.'

John Feverel said nothing, but watched her as she heaped the wood over the scant embers and sought to fan them into a flame. Perhaps it was the fixity of his glance which disturbed her, for she arose sharply and turned to seek a match. The skirt of her dress rested for a second on one of the dying embers, and as she stooped again the flames sprang up and enveloped her.

With the prompt decision of a man used to the facing of emergencies, John Feverel seized the heavy Oriental rug which lay before the hearth. He flung it instantly around the girl, and rolled it tightly, extinguishing the slight flame before it had force even to scorch her fair skin. For a minute he kept her wrapped closely in his arms.

Then, as he relaxed his hold a little, she released herself.

'But you must not let the fire go out,' she said, gently, 'even if it did try to burn me.'

He placed her in the chair before the hearth, and he stepped forward and stamped out the last lingering ember, powerless thereafter for good or evil. She watched him with a woman's acquiescence in the force of a man's will. When the last spark was quenched, he came to her and took her hand.

'Let the old fire of intolerance and hatred go out,' he said. 'For nearly two hundred years its smoke has cast a shadow over the Feverels. I hope for a new light and a purer flame on our hearth;' and he knelt beside her, and her hand rested in his.

THE ELIXIR OF DEATH

THE ELIXIR OF DEATH.

IT is Friday, the thirteenth day of November; it is just one year to-day since she died, and before night I shall have followed her across the mystic threshold of darkness and of death. It is just one year to-day since she died, alone, on the desolate ocean, in a foreign ship, with no friend near her, with only strange hands to do the last offices of this life, and with tongues yet stranger to answer her last words. She died at six in the evening, and at six in the evening I shall die, as lonely here in the great city as she on the dreary ocean. At six to-night, in two or three short hours more, when the chill wind falls down on the damp streets, amid the hurrying roar which declares that the day is done, I shall leave this life, as unworthy to die as I am to live.

I do not die to punish my sin. I know full well that for me it would be a punishment more deadly to live, with my body worn and racked, with my brain on fire, with my heart dull and heavy, with my conscience sharper than a serpent's tooth, with the awful knowledge I have now of the

emptiness of life. There is nothing for me to live for. I have no hopes, no desires even. For me the future is as black as the past. Annihilation—to be blotted out absolutely from the whole universe, to cease to be suddenly—body, and mind, and soul—this is the one thing I could wish, and this one thing I know I cannot attain. At most I can die; in life I can control myself; after death, what happens will happen—without effort on my part, and despite my utmost effort should I be foolish enough to resist.

Before I die, then, with the little strength now left to me, and in spite of the gnawing pain which will kill me at last, I write this record of my search for the Elixir of Death. Curiosity may lead some man to read it—the same curiosity which led me to my great crime, and through the crime to the great discovery. I shall not begin at my birth or at my bringing-up; it is of my death and not of my birth that curiosity will care to read. I am not yet two-score years of age; I shall die before I have attained half of the allotted years of man; and my life has been lived along one line—I have been an unceasing, unhasting, unresting inquirer. I have had always the same fatal and unquenchable curiosity which is the index of the highest and most masculine genius, as it is also the mark of the most feminine pettiness.

I was a youth of studious habits, with a persistent desire for investigation, especially in queer and odd paths little trodden by the average man—

that personification of the humdrum and the commonplace, from which I ever revolted. I had this same taste even as a boy—if indeed I ever was a boy. Sometimes when I have watched other children, I have wondered whether I was ever a child myself: it seemed to me as though I had always been what I was. A time came when I hoped to have had my childhood in the society of my own children; but now—— And yet perhaps it is best as it is: there are those who wish for children that they may be trained up to continue a great work, and to carry it on to ultimate victory. But I have made my great discovery and I have nothing to leave a son but a confession of the emptiness of life and the futility of desire. I do not know the meaning of family ties: my father died before I was born, and my mother died in giving me birth. I have always lived alone and lonely except during the few short months of my marriage.

When I left college I spoke French, and German, and Italian; I knew Greek and Latin better than most students of my age; and I had a smattering of Hebrew and Sanskrit. To science I had then given little attention, and I did not know enough to be aware of my own ignorance. My graduating thesis was on 'The Deadlock of Science;' I found it two or three years ago, and I was surprised at the sharpness of my reasoning, and at the depth of my incompetence to attempt a subject of which I knew nothing. I devoted myself at

once to the study of law with a youthful ardour, which has now burnt out and consumed itself utterly, leaving not so much as the smouldering ashes behind. I studied the old law-books; I learnt Norman French; I deciphered crumbling and mouldy treatises on Roman law, written in quaint mediæval Latin, full of queer elisions and contractions. It was not long before I discovered that medical jurisprudence interested me more than any other branch of law. From Wharton and Stillé I turned to the 'Gazette des Tribunaux,' and to the 'Newgate Calendar,' until I had a strange callousness to the details of physical suffering, until, indeed, it had for me a morbid fascination. I read all the famous trials; I became an expert on infanticide, on assault, on murder; I studied the details of death by strangulation, by the sword or dagger, and by poison. I found a special charm in the investigation of dormant charges of poisoning, freely bandied about in Italy and in France when the darkness of the middle ages was clearing away and the principles of toxicology began to be better understood. I gave a re-hearing to many an accused, and acquitted many a victim who had fallen beneath the axe, while I sent to the scaffold many a king and emperor, many a prince and pope who had died comfortably in his bed three hundred years before I was born. I became learned in poisons; I knew the differences between vegetable and mineral poisons; I knew the antidotes and remedies; I guessed the poison which has no anti-

dote. In the course of this study I soon felt the insufficiency of my preparation for scientific research, and for the investigation of physiological subtleties. I abandoned the law, and gave myself up to the study of medicine. I enrolled myself at a medical school, and began at the beginning to conquer the science of medicine as I had conquered the science of law. In this I found my legal studies and my linguistic training of the greatest use.

Time passed and I was graduated. For my thesis on 'The Future of Toxicology' I took a prize. I did not seek to set up as a physician after I received the diploma which gave me the right to cure or to kill. I did not need the little money I might make in practising, and I had already begun to hoard my time as the most precious of my possessions, if I expected ever to be of use to mankind. The little fortune which had hitherto supported me was enough for my simple wants. With strict economy I was enabled to set aside from my annual income a sum of money to be devoted to my research.

At first this money was spent in books, for I soon exhausted all that the best public and private libraries of New York contained on my specialty. I did not cumber my small rooms with the standard treatises, or with long sets of volumes to be found in every collection, but I took a keen delight in gathering together reports of trials for poisoning, not only in America and in England, but in France,

Germany, and especially in Italy. I had copies made for me from the secret archives of France; and thus, for instance, I obtained the interrogatories which confirmed the contemporary suspicions as to the cause of the death of Louvois. Correspondents in Italy sent me the useful fragments of unpublished memoirs as frank as those of Benvenuto Cellini or of Casanova de Seingalt, and as useful in the understanding of the past. Many a strange and tortuous transaction settled by the sudden hand of death I was able to read by the light of modern science, and to explain as clearly as Sir David Brewster explained the mystery of the legion of devils which appeared at midnight to Cellini in the Colosseum at Rome three centuries and a half ago.

Besides the books about poisoning, I had the poisons themselves. I arranged in chronological order a collection of the famous poisons of history, and in little vials on a single shelf of a bookcase might be seen the hemlock draught of Socrates, the potion which Locusta made ready at the bidding of Nero; the famous poison of the Borgias (far simpler and far more easy to counteract than its reputation warranted); the curious substances composing the candle which lighted Pope Clement VII. to his death; the mixture, also Italian, which Catherine de Medicis gave to Charles IX.; the subtle perfume, as deadly as the odour of the upas, with which the bouquet of Adrienne Lecouvreur was charged; the succession powder of the

Marquise de Brinvilliers ; the unpretending but efficacious dose given by Madame Lafarge to her husband ; and, worse than all, the Italian *acqua tofana*, colourless and odourless, yet so deadly that a single drop administered once a week caused death at the end of two years, during which time the very slightest ailment was inevitably fatal. I have stood before that little case of poisons hour after hour in rapt contemplation of the awful possibilities of destruction pent up within the scant score of tiny vials.

In time my researches were noised abroad ; I was known as an earnest student ; I was called upon to testify as an expert ; and I was soon recognised as an authority on toxicology. My testimony decided more than one case ; and more than once a man's life hung on the words that fell from my lips. In the great Hungerford trial, it was my original investigation and my startling experiment, repeated in court before the jury, which revealed the prisoner's guilt incontrovertibly, in spite of the feeble protests of a professor of analytical chemistry, the poor ignorant creature whom the defence had relied on to combat me. I suppose I ought not to call him ignorant now, as he has heard me testify so often that even he must have been forced to pick up a little knowledge of the elementary principles of toxicology.

It was at this time, just as my position was assured, that a strange thing happened to me—I

fell in love. I was in court bearing witness against a young man named Morgan, who was accused of having poisoned his father. Before I had said twenty words I became conscious of a look of intense appeal in the face of a beautiful girl sitting just below me. I turned my head so as to not see her, but her large mournful eyes rose before me, and the wistful twitch of her mouth I could not but recall. I caught sight of the prisoner's face, and in a second I was assured that the tall, pale creature with the sad and pitiful expression was his sister. A minute more and my plan was made: my testimony, which was wont to be firm and unhesitating, became weak and wavering. The counsel for the defence was a clever man, and he saw the openings I had left for him, and in five minutes of hurried cross-examination he got from me just the evidence his case needed. By great good fortune, the prosecution had also engaged the absurd old professor of analytical chemistry, and the counsel for the defence had no difficulty in turning the feeble old fellow inside out and in revealing the emptiness within. The jury acquitted Wilfred Morgan without leaving their seats, and within six months Lilian, his sister, was my bride.

We made a wedding trip to Europe, and we did what all newly married couples are wont to do.

We wandered through Scotland and England, and we spent a few days in London, where I found little to interest me. Life in humdrum England is tame to a man whose thoughts are set on the more

mysterious tragedies of human existence. We paused in Paris while I picked up rare volumes, long lacking on my shelves. We walked in Switzerland and rowed on Lake Geneva by moonlight under the shadow of Mont Blanc. We crossed into Italy, and here I felt my interest in humanity revive. We were happy, as man may be once in his life at least, for a little space. We found our happiness in each other, and each enjoyed the other's pleasure. At times it has seemed to me that the memory of this happiness has embittered the sorrow which followed it swiftly. In a dream sometimes I live those joyful days again, and then I awake to feel myself alone, and to know myself what I am. After all, sleep is but a palliative for the disease of life—death is the only remedy.

When we left Italy we passed up into the Tyrol, and there one day I heard a chance allusion to the arsenic-eaters, and I recalled an early desire to investigate for myself the habit of the workers in the arsenic mines, who feed daily on a fixed portion of the deadly mineral, not merely without injury or danger, but with advantage, in that they are thereby protected from the insidious assault of the fatal product of their labour. I went to the mines alone, for my wife had a horror of poison in all its forms. The word even was painful to her. She believed her brother to be innocent, but whenever she chose to close her eyes she could see him lying in prison, under the awful accusation of parricide.

My examination of the mine was to me most interesting and instructive. Strange as it may seem, I discovered that it was possible to poison by refusing to give poison; in other words, when a man has learnt to eat arsenic in a fixed dose with impunity, that dose is necessary to him, and if it is denied, then apparently the cumulative force of the mineral in his system is released, and he dies with every symptom of arsenical poisoning. The superintendent of the mines told me that at the age of eighteen, to protect himself from the pernicious effects of his daily toil, he took a grain of arsenic every morning in his coffee, and that he had gradually had to increase the dose until at the time I saw him, at the age of thirty-five, he took fifteen grains every day. Now I knew that fifteen grains is a quantity sufficient to kill five men. Twice had the superintendent been induced by timorous friends to try to stop the dangerous habit; and twice he had failed miserably. On the seventh day of the abstinence from arsenic he had been obliged to return to it again, on the penalty of his life. He was fully resolved, so he told me, that he would not again attempt to break off the habit suddenly, for he knew that the result would inevitably be fatal. He intended, when he should retire from his position, at the age of forty-five, to begin to reduce the daily dose gradually until, at fifty, he might give it up altogether. I took notes of his and of my own corroboratory observations, and I set down in bold black and white the fact

which had most struck me. It is possible to cause death by ceasing to administer a poison.

It was in the midst of the happiness of my bridal tour, when I smiled at the world and the responsive world willingly smiled back, and when the future was full of hope and desire, it was then that I caught the first glimpse of my great idea and was conscious of the first vague intimations of my great discovery. Perhaps it was my happiness which led me into the search for what was to bring misery and death to my wife and to myself. It was late in the spring, and we were in Vienna; and I can remember even now the feeling of unwonted cerebral excitement I experienced. It was to me a moment of growth and expansion. I felt that the fertility of my mind was multiplied fourfold, although of course in the beginning I knew neither the cause nor the effect of this. I can recall the very instant when the indistinct germ of the idea began to take root in my brain. An Austrian, a learned enthusiast in the history of his noble city, told me the moving tale of the attack of the Turks; and as I heard again how the fate of civilisation depended on the defence of one town against the host of Islam led by a mighty leader, I could not but think how much shorter it would have been to have struck at that leader and to have killed *him*, without whose energetic will the invaders would soon have been beaten back. To disorganise an attacking force by removing its head, suddenly, unexpectedly, at the most inopportune moment—

this would be at once the surest and the simplest means of defence. Then it was that I first thought of the Elixir of Death.

And from that instant the idea never left me; it took possession of me; it mastered me until I could master it. For the few weeks longer that we lingered in Europe I was still happy—a man does not get out of the habit of happiness all at once. But I had a fixed idea, and I pursued that relentlessly, to the mangling and destruction of whatever might stand between me and the accomplishment of my desire. What I sought was a thing so important to all humanity, that the few paltry human existences I might have occasion to sacrifice in the attainment of my goal were as nothing. For success in my search I was ready to give my own life, and I saw no reason why the lives of others should be more precious to me than my own.

The Elixir of Death was the name I had given in my own mind to the object of my search. And by the Elixir of Death I meant a poison of properties hitherto unknown or hitherto uncombined. I believed that it was possible to discover a poison which could be administered to anybody at any time and from any distance, with the result of causing instant death. Once in possession of the Elixir of Death, and I was master of the world. The Elixir of Death was a universal talisman to which all things were obedient, for death would come at its call, and death rules all things. If I

could once compound the Elixir of Death, I had it in my power to change the destiny of mankind and to mould all humanity to my will. If an Attila, a Tamerlane, a Genghis Khan, threatened civilisation, with the Elixir of Death I could remove him at once from the face of the earth. If a Napoleon arose, absorbing to himself by sheer force of will and intellect the human energy which should have been utilised in forwarding human progress, a single drop of the Elixir of Death would be more potent than he. If there should come a false prophet, leading all mankind astray by eloquent sophistries, I had but to use the Elixir of Death, and he ceased to be. If a great criminal should set himself above the law, and thus with impunity give an immoral example, the Elixir of Death would go on its way and do its deadly work, though the mighty malefactor were as inured to poison as Mithridates. When I had once discovered the Elixir of Death I should have—without let or hindrance or control—I should have the power of life and death over the whole world. If a man in the furthermost corner of the earth deserved to die, I had but to make use of the Elixir of Death and the man was dead. When my search should be successful I would have more power than any man who ever walked on the face of the earth. Yet I did not seek out this secret as a means of personal aggrandisement; I sought it for the furtherance of the cause of humanity. I had confidence in my own wish to do right. And now, in my last hour,

as I look back over the few months since the Elixir of Death came into my possession as the result and the reward of my labour and my crime, I can say boldly that I have never used it for selfish ends. What I have done with the Elixir of Death, inexplicable as it may have seemed to the blind and foolish crowd, was done always with the highest motives; but there is no need now to enter into futile explanations. What I did is done, and the future must judge.

The search for the Elixir of Death was long and toilsome, and abounded in false starts and sudden endings in blind alleys. Clue after clue I took up with hope and laid down again with a feeling akin to despair. Soon I gained heart once more and attacked the problem on another side. Again and again I was on the brink of success, when a final experiment dropped me instantly to the bottom of the precipice I had been trying to climb. The tortures of Tantalus and the tortures of Sisyphus together were not as hard to bear as those I endured without complaint. I had hope—nay, more, I had an unfailing belief that I should succeed at last. I *knew* that I should find the Elixir of Death before death found me. But this certainty as to the result did not lead me to relax any of my efforts for its attainment. I toiled unceasingly. Some days I worked so hard that when darkness came I could not sleep; then I would pace the silent streets all night, under the cold stars, with my mind at its highest tension; often I

have wondered why it did not break down. Again I would work sometimes for a week together day and night, never leaving my laboratory for rest or food.

In these months of wrestling with the unknown my wife was left to herself. To be mated to a man with one idea is to carry a ball and chain through life. An ardent enthusiast with his gaze fixed on the future is a sorry husband for any woman, but she may at least have the joy of sharing in his hopes and of consoling him in his disappointments. This joy was denied to my wife. From the very nature of the secret I was seeking, it could not be confided to her. I could not go to her and tell her how far I had advanced towards my great discovery. The mere thought of poison pained her; the word never crossed her lips, and she never entered my laboratory or my library. What she might see there was too painful in the memories it recalled to her. And thus it was that our happiness fell away and we began to drift apart. That I neglected her cruelly I know now, though I did not think of it then. Her life lost its sunshine and her heart failed her. She never repined, and if she murmured I never heard it. She was alone—as I was alone.

One morning a fresh misfortune fell upon her. She was devoted to her brother, whose life I had saved from the gallows, and against whom I never said a word to her. She believed in him; and even his moody ways and the unhappiness marked

on his face never shook her confidence in his innocence. After his acquittal he had gone back to his old business, and in the reaction of public sentiment in his favour he had been prosperous. Lilian left her small fortune in his hands, and at her suggestion I gave him mine to manage for me. I was never a man of business, but I ought not to have been blind to the fact that Wilfred Morgan was not in a condition to be trusted with the control of large sums of money. Knowing him and knowing what I had done, I ought to have kept watch over him. But I had but one thought—the Elixir of Death—and I paid no attention to Wilfred Morgan. Even the chance allusions that I happened to hear in regard to his speculations and dissipations did not make any impression on me. He always avoided me—I knew why. And I ascribed his haggard and hang-dog look to the same cause. So I was wholly unprepared for what happened. In spite of his frantic struggles to extricate himself, Wilfred Morgan was sucked deeper and deeper into the quicksands of speculation. He lost his own fortune, his sister's, mine, and then he shot himself through the heart.

On the evening of the day that this happened I had made the most important step towards my discovery. I had found the constituent elements of the Elixir of Death. To combine them in exactly the best proportions and to give them the further property of doing their deadly work at any distance—these were the things I had yet to do

before the Elixir of Death was an assured success. And these things, I knew, would take many months more of unhesitating hard labour of body and mind. The shot that killed Wilfred Morgan shattered all my plans. To accomplish my great purpose I needed all my time, and an absolute freedom from material cares was indispensable. The loss of my little fortune and of my wife's meant that I should have to support myself by the practice of my profession—either law or medicine, as I might choose.

Fortunately, just at this moment the editors of a great encyclopedia of medicine, a huge undertaking to which all the most eminent specialists were to contribute, asked me to prepare for them the treatise on toxicology and on medical jurisprudence, and to superintend the preparation of the host of minor titles in both these subjects. For these labours, which took but two or three hours a day, the payment was liberal and prompt. I was enabled to continue my researches; but I found that I now made little progress. I needed more time and I needed more money. I was forced to feel keenly the loss of my fortune; I am glad to say that I never took thought how I could make another. Yet I had power to get money in ways unknown to other men.

I had often smiled as I read the story of the seekers after the Philosopher's Stone, which might transmute the baser metals into gold and silver. What was gold and what was silver to a true philo-

sopher given over, body and soul, to the solution of a problem which seemed inscrutable even to those who were capable of conceiving its conditions? As vain as the efforts of the seekers after the Philosopher's Stone were the wanderings of those who thought to find the Fountain of Youth. But their motives were more laudable. That a man should desire to be young even after he had acquired the wisdom of years—that he should wish to have an unclouded eye and a quick hand, to execute what his more mature mind had conceived—this I could understand and tolerate. But, like wealth, youth is a means only, and the alchemists made it an end. To live for ever—which was the aim of those who sought the Elixir of Life—what a paltry endeavour was this! Of what account is life, in comparison with knowledge and power? And when men have attained to perpetual life, they have always found it a curse and never a blessing. Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, and Vanderdecken, the Flying Dutchman—they had forced upon them what the seekers after the Elixir of Life were in search of, and they hated it, and they held themselves accursed that they had it. What Ahasuerus and Vanderdecken would have given their souls to possess was the Elixir of Death.

That I should be debarred from this precious discovery by barren considerations of money or time, was intolerable. Perhaps, if I had had a friend to whom I could pour forth my projects, and to whom I could explain my disappointments, and

who could strengthen me with inspiring consolation and encouragement, I might have thrown off the feeling of impatient and feverish irritation and recklessness which came upon me. But I had no friend in the world. To my wife I could say nothing; shrouded in her grief, she glided silently about our four rooms, until I came to shrink from looking at her lest I should reproach her as the cause of my loss. If only she had not fixed her gaze upon me when I was about to testify in court, her brother would not have lived to bring ruin on us both. But consequences are pitiless.

While I was in this unhealthy and morbid state of mind, and while we were living thus insufferably, I happened to take down from an upper shelf the note-books I had used during my wedding trip to Europe. Loosely in the leaves of one of them I found two folded papers; they were the insurance policies on my life and on my wife's, each for fifty thousand dollars, and each for the other's benefit, which we had taken out, at the suggestion of Wilfred Morgan a few days after we were married. He had made the payments on them as they came due. With the papers in my hand I made a hasty calculation and I found that it was almost time to make another payment lest the policy should lapse by default. Moved by an inexplicable impulse, I picked out a hundred rare volumes from my over-crowded shelves, and took them to a bookseller who had recently told me that a customer of his was collecting a toxicological library; and the

money he gave me for these sufficed to keep alive the policy on my wife's life. If she should die I would receive the insurance on her life; with fifty thousand dollars I could complete the Elixir of Death beyond all question or dispute. And I knew that my wife was tired of life and that she longed for the rest of the grave. And the sight of her pale face wore on me more and more, day by day.

Perhaps I was mad; I do not know. A great physician has said that all men are mad. It may be that he was right, and that I was only a little more mad than my fellow-man. It may be that I am mad now. I know little about madness, yet I know more than most, for I know I know nothing. I despise the poor creatures who spend themselves prying into the nooks and recesses of the brain, when there is so much work in the world at large waiting to be done.

The note-book in which I had found the policies lay on my desk for a few days. When I took it up, I saw that it was the one in which I had recorded my notes in the Tyrol. I read them again in silence, and a sort of stupor fell upon me. I sat still and stolid for an hour or more, then I arose and locked the note-book in the secret drawer of my desk, and I went out for a walk. It was nearly midnight in the middle of winter, and a chill rain froze as fast as it fell. When I returned home just before dawn, I was clothed in a cerement of ice, but I had not felt the cold. I

went at once into the little room which served me as a laboratory.

The next day my wife complained of burning pains. I gave her medicine to relieve her, and although it did no immediate good, the pains gradually wore away, and had wholly gone at the end of the week. A few weeks later they returned only to disappear again a few days later. I had increased the daily dose of arsenic that I gave my wife every morning in her coffee.

After that I increased it every three weeks, and once every three weeks my wife had these burning pains. I always prescribed for her in vain effort to relieve the inevitable suffering. I gave time to this which I had to take from my labours on the Elixir of Death—time that I could ill spare if I was ever to accomplish anything. I was glad to know that in spite of these pains Lilian was in excellent health ; and in time I came to have a strong scientific interest in her case. I noted every symptom and I watched every change. I think she mistook the meaning of my attention, and for a little while at least she was happy in the thought that I loved her again. Her love gave her strength to bear the pangs which came upon her so mysteriously.

In this manner nearly a year had sped with its burden of anxiety, and I determined to test the success of my experiment—not to end it finally, however, as the time for that had not yet come. One day I did not administer the usual dose of

arsenic, nor did I the next nor the next. In less than a week Lilian began to fall away; she was too feeble to walk; she could not eat; she was burnt up by the gnawing pain within; in a word, she had every symptom of arsenical poisoning. There could be no doubt as to the success of the experiment. If I did not at once give her the portion of arsenic to which she had become accustomed she would die. On the eighth day after the cessation I gave her the poison again, in her coffee, at breakfast. It was but a trifling dose, but its effect was instantaneous. She revived and began to improve. In ten days I had returned to the full dose; I had even increased it slightly; and Lilian had recovered her strength. Yet she was taking every day four grains of arsenic, a quantity sufficient to kill two able-bodied men.

I now began to prepare for the end, and I longed for the end to come that I might get on with my work. For several months so severe was the tension on my nerves that I had been unable to go on with the search for the Elixir of Death. Beyond a few barren experiments, mechanically conducted to an unsatisfactory conclusion, I had done nothing, and I was possessed by a passionate longing to get to work again as soon as might be. Every day's delay maddened me. Anxious as I was, and eager as I was, to gain possession of the money which I needed in my great work, I was not wanting in caution. I had no wish to see the man who was on the brink of the discovery of the

Elixir of Death haled to prison for a vulgar murder. I took counsel of my cunning. Hitherto I had ministered to all my wife's ailments, and she never dreamed of consulting another physician. I knew a conceited, good-natured, foolish young fellow who had just been graduated from the medical school, where he had been a favourite pupil of the poor doddering old professor of analytical chemistry. From him I had nothing to fear, and him therefore I called in—a compliment which gratified him immeasurably. He came to see my wife several times and saw nothing. I gave Lilian a little medicine, and I threw in her way one or two books on climate. I began to drop hints that perhaps she had a tendency to consumption, likely to be developed rapidly by one of the harsh winters of New York. Her mother, who had married again, was living at Nice, and I suggested that there was no better climate for consumptives than Nice. As luck would have it, the next letter from Lilian's mother came from Mentone, and it expressed a wish that Lilian would come over and spend the winter with them at Nice. Then I arranged to meet the young doctor, accidentally, and I inoculated him with the idea that my wife was consumptive, and needed a season in the South of France, where she could have complete change and rest. I knew Lilian could hardly bear to part from me, so I called in the young doctor, and the suggestion came from him. My wife indignantly rejected it, but I combated it so feebly that the

young doctor persevered. For a week or ten days after his visit nothing more was said about her joining her mother; then the discussion was suddenly revived. The young doctor was called in again; his forcible arguments converted me reluctantly, and I told her she ought to go if she wished to save her life.

She yielded at last when I promised to rejoin her in the spring. I engaged her state-room on the 'Deutschland,' to sail Saturday, November 6, and on Sunday, the first day of November, I gave her the last dose of arsenic. In two or three days the effects of the cessation from the poison began to be apparent, but it was then too late to draw back. When Saturday came, and I took her on board the boat and led her to her state-room, and was about to say good-bye, she aroused herself from the dull lethargy into which she had sunk a few hours before. She clung to me and asked if I could not give up my work and go with her. And as she asked that she knew it was impossible. Then she begged me not to ask her to leave me. If she had consumption, she was not afraid of death, she said, and she was ready to die here by my side in New York. I told her that it was too late then to draw back. She cast her large mournful eyes on me with a most pitiful look and said, 'If I am to die, I would rather die here.' Then she roused herself, and stood up and said that if she must die she would rather die by my hand.

I comforted her as best I could, and just as the

bell rang for the departure of the boat I administered a soporific, which soon soothed her into slumber. Then I left the vessel, and stood on the dock, and saw it glide away from my sight as Lilian had glided out of my heart, fading away gradually until I could no longer distinguish it in the dim distance. I knew that the end was at hand. I knew that Lilian would die eleven or twelve days after I had ceased to give the arsenic; and I knew that her death would be ascribed to sea-sickness, while her body would be consigned to the waves. And so it came to pass. In a month all was over; the news came of the safe arrival out of the 'Deutschland,' one passenger, the wife of an eminent American scientist, having died on the voyage from the effects of sea-sickness. In a few weeks the proof of her death had been given to the Life Insurance Company, and I had received the fifty thousand dollars I needed for my search after the Elixir of Death.

It is impossible to describe the buoyant joy I felt the first time I entered my laboratory after I had received the money, and I knew that I could thereafter devote my time wholly to the cause of science without any vulgar thought of money-making. I had the fierce delight the Arctic explorer might feel could he stand in sight of the open polar sea. For I too was in sight of my goal, although the packed ice of poverty had kept me from going forward. I had combined the ingredients of the Elixir of Death, and all that remained

to do was to devise the method of administration, at any time, at any distance, and in spite of any precautions against it. When compared with what I had accomplished, what remained to be achieved was the veriest trifle. I came to my work fresh and with a new burst of enthusiasm, and after a month of hard labour I discovered the principle, and within another month I had perfected the application of it. Like all really great discoveries, it had the merit of extraordinary simplicity. Taking a hint from the Indian who sends hurtling through the air, straight to the heart of the victim, the poisoned arrow, the point of which he has steeped in the venom of the serpent's sting, I bent my utmost endeavours to the utilisation of natural forces, and in time I taught them to do my bidding. Within three months after I had seen my wife sail away from my sight to meet a watery grave, I stood alone in my laboratory at midnight with a tiny vial in my hand containing the Elixir of Death. I had discovered the poison which could cause the death of any one, at any time, at any distance, despite any and all precautions. The Elixir of Death was mine at last, and the whole world was in my power!

With the accomplishment of my desire I lost my object in life. I had attained to the utmost of my wish. There was nothing further for me to do. To use the power I possessed was not part of my plan. It was the possession of the power which I

had sought, and not its use. The wanton exercise of might was always repugnant to me and I was tender-hearted enough never to kill an insect except to effect a purpose. While I was seeking the Elixir of Death it seemed to me that the occasions for its righteous use would be numberless, but when I had found the Elixir of Death I considered the few apparent occasions which reluctantly presented themselves, and they were inadequate. No Genghis Khan or Tamerlane threatened civilisation ; no Napoleon was master of mankind ; no False Prophet had arisen to lead humanity astray. Soon I saw that it might be a century before there would be need for the Elixir of Death —and in a century where should I be ? I could not hope, and I knew I did not wish to live as long as that.

If I were not alive when the occasion arose for the use of the Elixir of Death, who would there be to administer it ? That was the question to which I gave prolonged thought. I knew no man to whom I could trust my secret. I knew no man in whose hands I would willingly place the awful power and the mighty temptation of the Elixir of Death. I knew no man strong enough to withstand that temptation and wise enough to wield the power solely for the benefit of all mankind. I knew no man who would have self-restraint enough not to make use of the Elixir of Death for the furtherance of his own self-interest. The longer I considered this question, the less I felt

disposed to let the great secret pass from my own keeping. In time I began to doubt even my own worthiness to have and to hold the Elixir of Death. I saw that, even in my own hands, the proper exercise of the mighty power I possessed depended wholly on my own fallible judgment; and I feared that a day might come when my will should be weaker and when I myself might yield to the temptation and use the Elixir of Death for some paltry purpose of my own.

Then I awakened to the solemn fact, that if there was no one to whom I could entrust the Elixir of Death after I had ceased to live, and if there was even a doubt whether I myself were altogether to be trusted to use it only at the right moment, then, alas! the discovery had been futile, and all hope of its benefiting the world was vain. Slowly I awakened to the absolute uselessness of the Elixir of Death. That it was a mighty engine of good to mankind I knew, but there was no man fit to be trusted with its keeping.

When this chilling truth was borne in upon me, I had a moment of profound discouragement. And at this moment my thoughts went back to the wife whose life I had taken in the search for what was worthless now I had it. I saw the mournful and appealing glance of her large eyes as we stood side by side in the cabin of the steamship just before she went away to her lonely death in desolate mid-ocean. Life had no longer anything to

offer me but the bitterness of ashes; everything sank from under me at once. One night, as I sat in the laboratory, with my eyes fixed on the little vial which held the product of my thankless toil, I saw Lilian enter the room, smiling sadly. She stood before me for a minute, and then withdrew as mysteriously as she had come, beckoning to me as she disappeared.

Then I made a solemn vow, which I have performed to the best of my ability. Lilian had died by my hand from the sudden stoppage of the habit of arsenic-eating. I must die the same death. This was my resolve. I began arsenic-eating at once, and as I was stronger than she had been, and as I had nothing now to fear, I increased the doses more frequently than I had dared to do with her. I felt the burning pangs for four days every fortnight, as I increased the daily dose. In less than half the time, I have reached the same amount she took before I sent her away to die. She died alone on the thirteenth of November, and on the thirteenth of November, to-day, I shall die the same death and in the same loneliness. She was buried at sea, but it may be days before the people of the house miss me and break in here to find my body. Twelve days ago I took my daily allowance of four grains of arsenic, and since then I have not touched it: I ought to die to-night. My strength is greater than hers, and my constitution is stronger, and I fight harder against the

suddenly released power of the accumulated poison. It may be that it will not kill me to-day, but I shall die to-night, for all that. If the arsenic does not do its work in season, I have here the little vial of the Elixir of Death, and for once at least it shall be of service to mankind.

WAITING

WAITING.

It was a clear, cold afternoon, such as we are wont to have in New York in mid-winter. If the old English saw keeps its teeth in our New England civilisation, this Christmas would make a lean churchyard, for although the brilliant shop windows were smartly decked with green, the streets and the roofs were white with snow. There had been a heavy fall the night before, and the moist flakes had heaped themselves into a soft and fleecy cushion a foot thick; then in the morning had come a sharp frost, freezing out the water from the snow-banks cast up by the ploughs of the street-car companies, and by the individual efforts of the householders. And now it was Christmas Eve, and the hurrying multitudes, anxious or joyous, happy or gloomy, some expanding under the glow of the merry season, some shutting themselves only the tighter in their shells—all tramped up and down Broadway, crunching the hard, dry crystals beneath their feet, and shaking from their heads the continuous hail of tiny particles which blew from every housetop.

Amid this throng of men and women buying the final, forgotten Christmas gifts, and hurrying home for the Christmas rejoicing and rest, walked Alfred Rollinston, so deeply absorbed in his own thoughts that he did not see the people as they passed him. He was thinking of the letter he had written two days before. He had asked for an immediate answer; the mail should be in New York by this time; and in a few minutes more that answer ought to be in his hands. He could hardly doubt what it would be—yet he hoped faintly that it might not be what he expected. The hope, vague and slight as it was, made him a little less unwilling to get the answer and to know the worst at once. His letter had been written to Susan Hallett, to whom he had been engaged for years; and it was to ask her to meet him two days hence, that they might be married without further delay; and he was hoping feebly that her answer would reveal some just cause or impediment why they should not be joined together in matrimony.

As he walked up Broadway in the thick of the holiday crowd, not seeing it at all, and not noticing the dull, red sunset, visible suddenly and afar off at every crossing, his thoughts went back to his childhood and hers, in the little village on Cape Cod, where they were born, and where they had been brought up, side by side. He recalled distinctly the first time he had seen her; it was on a sunny Sunday morning, as they came out of the

high pews of the square white meeting-house ; he was a little fellow of five or six, and she looked down on him kindly, for she was a year or two older than he. From that day onward their lives had been bound together. When he went to the short winter school, she helped him with his lessons. There arose before him, as he paced the streets of New York that cold Christmas Eve, a sudden picture of the plain little school-house on Cape Cod, and of a girl standing in a corner in disgrace, because she persisted in prompting a little boy who had neglected his speller. And after school they had played together, shoeless and happy in her father's orchard, just back of the fine, rambling old house in which she lived, built long before the Revolution, and bearing its hundred years as sturdily as ever. To the boy, living alone with his mother, a poor widow, in a tiny little frame cottage, the house in which she belonged seemed like a palace, and in his eyes her father was a king—and of a truth, her father was a man of importance ; he had shares in several boats, he had money out at interest, he was the chief underwriter of the county, and he was always chosen moderator of the town meeting. On Sunday, which was kept on the Cape with Puritan severity, they had to wear shoes, and they could not play for twenty-four hours after sunset on Saturday : they wished the long day to draw to an end ; and they watched and waited together on Sunday evening for the going down of the Sunday sun. And so their childhood had

passed ; and the sharp wind which cut the face of the man as, just then, he came to a street corner, was not as keen as the regret he felt in his heart for the happiness of those days gone for ever. Yes, they had been boy and girl together, and now, alas! they were man and woman. There were times when he felt almost like an old man, and when he looked on her as quite an old woman.

It was the breaking out of the war which first parted them. He was only fourteen years old, but he went to the front with the first company from the Cape, and as a drummer-boy he saw four years' hard fighting with the Army of the Potomac. In all those years he was able to get home only once to see her and to see his mother. Just before his brigade left Appomattox to take part in the final grand review of the armies of the Union, there came to him a letter from her, with deep edges of black, telling him of his mother's sudden death, but saying nothing of the loving care and comforting service which she had lavished on that mother, left alone while he was doing his duty in the sharp tussle of war. What kindness there was in the simple words of that letter! He recalled every sentence of it, though it was eighteen years since he had read it. All his recollections of her in the days of her youth were gracious and tender, and as his mind went back along old tracks of thought, and as his memory gave up numberless instances of her womanly goodness, his heart smote him, and he reproached himself ; he even wondered at him-

self, and he dimly dreaded the day when she should discover the change in him.

By this time his rapid walk had brought him to the intersection of Broadway and Fifth Avenue at Twenty-third Street. He crossed the street and entered the Fifth Avenue Hotel. As he stood before the counter of the office, the clerk nodded to him in cheerful recognition, and said :

'I do not know whether the ladies are in yet, Mr. Rollinston, but I can send your card up.'

Alfred Rollinston flushed to the temples, as a man may do when he discovers suddenly that another has noticed what he supposed he had kept close.

'Thank you,' he said with an imperceptible effort, 'but I cannot pay any visits this afternoon. I came to see if you had a letter for me. I'm expecting one by the afternoon mail—and I asked to have it addressed here, as I may dine here before I leave the city to-night.'

The impassive but observant clerk glanced at a handful of letters and said, 'There is nothing for you here, Mr. Rollinston.'

'There is perhaps hardly time for it just yet,' replied Rollinston as he turned away. He drew a long breath of relief, like a man reprieved.

As he walked out of the hotel, and across the broad avenue to Madison Square, he wondered how the clerk had come to notice his visits to the hotel. Surely they had not been enough to excite remark. Once in the square, he turned and gazed

up at the windows of one of its apartments. But in the dusk of the twilight there was nothing to be seen at these windows, the shades of which had not yet been lowered. Alfred Rollinston turned abruptly and began to walk up Fifth Avenue. With approaching night the air seemed more chill, and he fastened another button of his overcoat. Suddenly, from the tall mast in the centre of Madison Square, there flashed out the electric light, etching on the white grass-plots the bare limbs of the ice-clad trees as sharply as though they were bitten in by a pungent acid. Up and down Fifth Avenue the sidewalks were illumined by the blue glare of the electric light as it fell from the high posts at the street corners. Its azure radiance and the jingling of the distant car-bells recalled the moonlight sleigh-rides and the other frolics of the little Cape Cod town, the winter after the war, when Alfred Rollinston was petted by all the old folks and allowed to do as he liked. He wondered now how it was that he did not then see that Susan Hallett loved him. It was not until two years later that he found out he loved her. It was in the spring of '68, when he was just twenty-one, that he became conscious, all at once, that his heart was not his own, but hers. He recalled all his doubts and hesitations, all the delicious self-torture of a young man in love, all the abounding joy of an unexpected proposal frankly accepted. Of course, marriage was not to be thought of till he was able to support a wife. Until then he had led

a happy-go-lucky life, making out as best he might. It was understood that she was to wait for him, and that they were to be married only when he had at least begun to make his way in the world. And she was waiting yet!

At first he found it difficult to settle down. Four years of army life, good as its discipline had been in many ways, were not altogether the best training for making money. He tried one thing after another, and he stayed nowhere long. He remembered his last day as an auctioneer's clerk and his first attempt as a reporter. In time, his heart began to fail him a little, and he discovered that he had not the grit to gainstand burly misfortune. He reflected on the text, 'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,' from which the absent-minded minister had preached the morning he was baptized; it came back to him with all the force of a prophecy from the pulpit. When he was most despondent about his future, and well-nigh ready to give up the struggle, Susan came to his rescue. Not only did she cheer him with loving words, but she induced her father to get an old friend in Boston to give him another chance. It so happened that the new situation fell in with his wayward mood, and he took hold of his work in earnest. In another year or two he had an assured position. And as Alfred Rollinston reached Thirty-fourth Street and began to retrace his steps, he remembered that it was on a Christmas Eve, just ten years before, that his employers had given

him the increase of salary which warranted his writing to ask her to name the day. But in the four years which had nearly elapsed since their engagement, her circumstances had changed. Her father had made unfortunate investments, and his health had begun to fail. She was an only child, and she could not leave her father alone. They must wait a little longer yet.

She had a deferred hope that her father might be persuaded to move to Boston, and then the marriage might take place. But the old man clung to his native town. His little property shrank into nothing; and his health faded until he took to his bed at last. Then, after lingering two years, he died. Susan Hallett settled his affairs, paid his few debts, and collected the scant hundred dollars which remained. Then the wedding day was fixed, after long years of waiting, and, a week before it arrived, the firm by which Rollinston was employed, failed, under the pressure of panic and long-drawn depression, and he was once more thrown on the world to begin again. She had an aunt in a little town in Ohio, and she went there and began to teach school. He started again on the search for work. And again the taint of instability in his character was made evident, and he did not prosper. So it had been for years now; whatever he turned his hand to crushed within his grasp. At last, however, it looked as though luck had changed; and Alfred Rollinston quickened his pace, and raised his head. Across the square

on a screen high above the heads of the people, was a magic-lantern advertisement, just then setting forth the best, cheapest, and quickest route to Omaha. This struck him as a good omen. Sam Sargent, the great speculator, wanted a man with a wide experience of life to take charge of the Omaha division of the Transcontinental Telegraph Co., and with the new year Alfred Rollinston was to begin this new work. So he had written to Susan Hallett, asking her to marry him and to go on with him to Omaha; and he had requested her to answer him by return mail; and he was hoping against hope that there might come a refusal.

As he crossed the double street before the Fifth Avenue Hotel, he looked again at the windows of one apartment. He saw that it was lighted up; and as he gazed, a slight, girlish figure appeared at one of the windows and lowered the shade. For a moment her outline was visible; then all was dark, as the inner curtains had been dropped. He knew the room and its gracious inmates, and he had been made welcome there more than once in the past few weeks. He sighed bitterly as he entered the hotel.

'Has that letter come yet?' he asked.

'Nothing for you as yet, Mr. Rollinston,' answered the clerk. 'But we shall have our mail in a few minutes now.'

Rollinston went out again into the open air, and drew a long breath. He thought how man changes in time, and woman also. In the dreary years of

waiting, he had become very different from the stripling who fell in love with Susan Hallett. She, too, had altered. He wondered if he had changed for the worse. He knew he was not good enough for her—and he caught himself wishing she were not quite so good. If she had not been flawless in character, he might have loved her longer. It was not that he resented her moral superiority exactly, though at times he could not but chafe under it. Her code of life was almost too exacting for every-day use. Even as a girl, there had been a trace of rigidity in her manner. She was as gentle and as kind as anyone, but as she grew older she stiffened and hardened. She had led a plain and simple life in the country, while he had enjoyed the gaieties and pleasures of the city, not always as wholesome as they might be. On the rare occasions when he was able to be with her, he began to feel ill at ease. He thought that she had seen the constraint which grew on him in her presence. With wider and diverging experience of life, they seemed to him less well-mated, and the marriage at last appeared less desirable. They had developed in different directions, and a difference of taste in the enjoyments of life may strain the affections severely. He felt the tie between them loosening, and he was conscious that they were drifting apart, although she seemed not to suspect it.

She kept all her little country ways, and she clung to these provincialisms with a strange persistency.

She had the simple and natural good manners of her ancestors, but these did not always accord with the higher, artificial code Rollinston had learnt to obey. His every nerve tingled when he noted some phrase or act of hers which seemed to him a lapse from the false standard he accepted; and she was always making these lapses; he suffered at every one, and he suffered silently while waiting for them. When he saw her last, she wore her hair in a bunch of curls at the back of her head. They made her look like a 'school-marm.' He had told her they were old-fashioned and 'Western'—a term of bitter reproach in his mouth. She had coloured and said nothing then, though afterwards she remarked quietly that she supposed she was getting set in her ways and quite like an old maid. He remembered that she had been more thoughtful and serious afterward. It was true, though; she had lost the pliancy of youth, while he was as flexible as ever.

Then, as he thought of the past—of his boyhood, of his mother's death, of the happy courting, of her patience and tenderness—a pang of poignant self-reproach seized him, and he wondered whether he had allowed any of his dissatisfaction to leak into his letter to her. He was afraid it was cold, and he knew it was not cordial. He had written to her as lovingly as he could, trying to keep back his weariness of the bond that bound them, and his longing to break it asunder. Would she be sharp enough to see through him? Small

minds are easily suspicious, and as easily quieted, but a large mind, like hers—for she had a large and noble nature—is slow to suspect, but sure to probe to the truth when once aroused. He meant to keep his troth in good faith, to abide by the letter of the bond—the spirit was beyond his control already. He had read in some book of maxims that there are times when to act reasonably is to act like a coward. He knew it was unreasonable for them to marry now ; but was he not a coward to confess this even to himself? He felt mean in his own eyes when he thought how he had hoped there might be some unforeseen obstacle to her acceptance.

Just then he was aroused from his reveries by the hoarse cries of newsboys proclaiming an extra, and announcing a horrible loss of life in a railroad accident. He bought the paper with an involuntary hope that perhaps the train which had borne his letter to her might have been destroyed ; for, in that case, he would have written differently. But the extra was a catch-penny, and the trifling accident it described was in California.

Again he looked up at the windows of one apartment in the hotel ; and in the room next to the one where the shades had been lowered he saw the bright glitter of a resplendent Christmas-tree. Evidently the occupants of the apartment had forgotten to close the curtains. He could see the lissom figure of the graceful girl who had lowered the shade in the adjoining room. Then

the door was opened, and a troop of laughing children came pouring in, dancing with delight around the one girl, who began detaching the presents. As his eyes followed her about the room, he did not notice an elderly lady who approached the window and suddenly dropped the heavy curtains, shutting him out from all share in the innocent gaiety within. Rollinston started, shivered a little, and shook from his shoulders the snow which had begun to fall a few minutes before. He went over to the hotel to ask again for the letter, the only Christmas present he was likely to receive; and whether it was to be a gift of good or evil, he did not dare to consider.

As he approached the counter, the clerk held up an envelope.

'Here's your letter, Mr. Rollinston,' he said.

Alfred Rollinston seized the envelope and tore it open hastily. Then he hesitated. He walked into the bar-room, drank a small glass of brandy, and took a seat in a quiet corner. At last he unfolded the letter, and read it with a rapid glance.

This is what he read:

'Ever since I saw you last, Alfred, I have feared that our paths in life would part sooner or later. Your letter makes the parting certain. We have grown away from each other. I release you, I forgive you, but I shall never forget you. Go where you will, my good wishes shall go with you.

'SUSAN HALLETT.'

Spottiswoode & Co., Printers, New-street Square, London.

Stirling, September 1893

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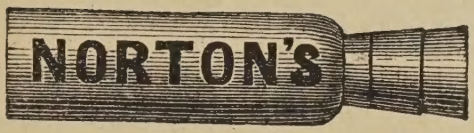
TRADE 

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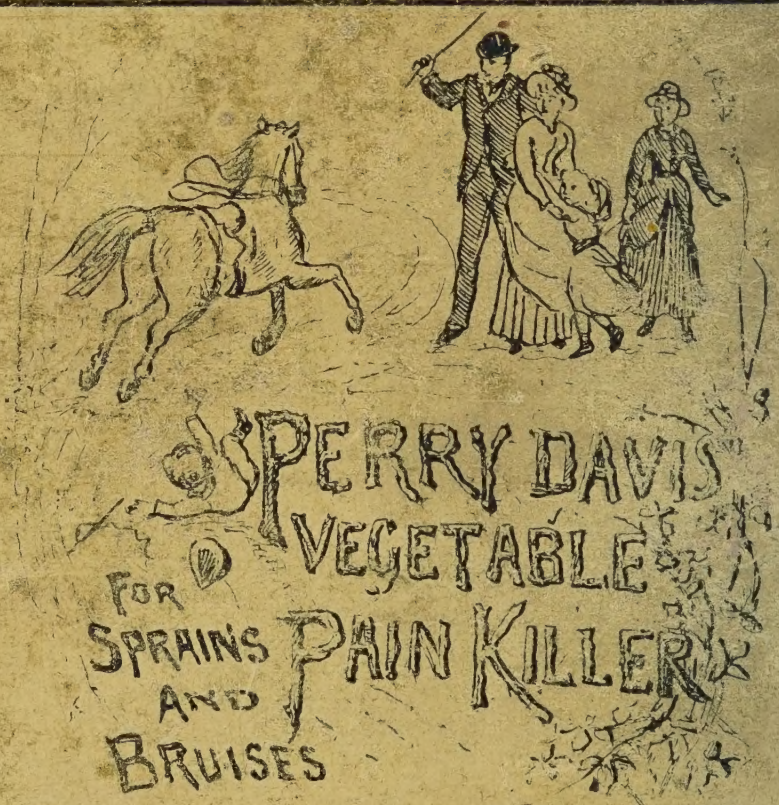

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